



The End of Literature, Hegel, and the Contemporary Novel

Francesco Campana

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To my parents

Preface

In his famous and widely discussed essay *Why Bother?*, now present in the collection *How to Be Alone*, Jonathan Franzen questions the meaning of a literary genre such as the social novel for the contemporary world and is struck by its manifest loss of centrality in society, especially in comparison with the past. His essay, which previously appeared in the April 1996 issue of *Harper's* magazine with the title *Perchance to Dream: In the Age of Images, a Reason to Write Novels*, sums the problem up in the following way: 'In the nineteenth century, when Dickens and Darwin and Disraeli all read one another's work, the novel was the preeminent medium of social instruction. A new book by Thackeray or William Dean Howells was anticipated with the kind of fever that a late-December film release inspires today' (Franzen 2002, 65). Mass and consumer society, with its new technologies and chaotic network of information, has led to the loss of the pivotal role that the social novel and literature in general played two centuries ago. This happened in favour of more direct and instant media such as television, radio, photography and even journalism: 'Today's Baudelaires are hip-hop artists', Franzen stated (Franzen 2002, 66). Through a long reflection on his personal experience—he had already published his first two novels

but it was still five years before *The Corrections*—and the discouraging periods regarding his social role as a writer, Franzen tells us how his perception of literature gradually changed: in the abandonment of a ‘depressive realism’ and in the passage ‘from being immobilized by darkness to being sustained by it’ (Franzen 2002, 92), he rediscovers a renewed sense of trust as a writer who paradoxically believes in the potentialities of literature even today. He adopts an attitude that he calls ‘tragic realism’, which is an approach to things that, without simplifying conflicts in empty and hypocritical banalities, preserves complexity and the possibility of ‘access to the dirt behind the dream of Chosenness—to the human difficulty beneath the technological ease, to the sorrow behind the pop-cultural narcosis: to all those portents on the margins of our existence’ (Franzen 2002, 92). This happened thanks to a series of personal circumstances, ranging from the discovery of the works of the anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath on the emancipatory potential of reading fiction up to a letter he received from Don DeLillo that placed writing as a form of freedom and personal self-salvation bearing moments of relevance (though increasingly rare) even in contemporary society. By means of the writer, Franzen tells us about a personal evolution that took place through individual circumstances, but which also has the character of a historical-cultural analysis, as well as a critical-literary one.

Franzen’s essay is explicitly connected with a famous debate around the possibility of the ‘great American (social) novel’. At the same time, less explicitly, it is also one of the latest contributions of another long tradition, which developed in a more international context, namely that of *the end of the novel* and, even more generally, *the end of literature*, which was itself part of the discourse on *the end of art*. The quarrel around the end of art has countless variations, made up of continuous declarations of the end (if not death) of art and equally persistent new beginnings, and which has its origin as a theoretical discourse in Hegel’s philosophy. For Hegel, art in modernity loses its centrality and becomes ‘a thing of the past’, reaching a degree of awareness of itself that perhaps even pushes it to become something else.

Especially in the twentieth century, the tradition of the end of art has often been evoked in the attempt to understand the radical and

apparently irreversible changes that the field of the arts has undergone. In fact, if one looks at figurative art in particular (but such a discourse could also be put forward for other art forms, such as music, dance and architecture), something really seems to have changed. Mainly through the revolutions of the historical avant-gardes and the new avant-gardes, figurative art as it has generally been presented and conceived for centuries seems to have disappeared. A new way of making and perceiving art seems to have taken over, which no longer offers us an aesthetic experience to enjoy on a sensory level, but rather disorients and questions us from many directions. If one compares a gallery of Renaissance works and an international festival of contemporary art, the radical turning point seems evident.

Given this background, the basic question of this book is: Does the same shift happen in literature? Has literature experienced a radical and irreversible change analogous to the figurative arts? Does literature share with figurative arts (and other arts) the same fate towards its end?

The answer I intend to give is no. Literature deals with its end in a very peculiar way. It does not seem to have experienced a definitive and unavoidable change but has shown—with the means and in the ways that are proper to it—a capacity for resisting its end through continuous self-renewal. But then, does literature experience its own end or does it keep itself completely unaffected by a process of ending? And if it experiences any end, even in resistance to it, what kind of end are we talking about? What kind of literature is produced after the end of art? What kind of literature emerges *after literature*?

I will argue my position by showing that literature bears key differences compared to other arts. I will dwell on that difference which, within the common sphere of art in general, distinguishes literature from the rest of the arts. Then, I will retrace various traditions regarding the end of art, literature and the novel. Within these traditions and returning to their origin, I will therefore propose an interpretative key in the wake of Hegelian philosophy that aims to understand some fundamental trends of contemporary literature as ways that literature has found to resist its end. I will show how literature, remaining itself and without going through the upheavals that other arts have gone through,

has found its own specific strategies to go through its own end. This book thus attempts to investigate the way literature faces its end and unfolds how it continuously (and perhaps since forever) puts an end to its own end.

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Reference

Franzen, J. (2002). Why Bother? In J. Franzen, *How to Be Alone. Essays* (pp. 55–96). New York: HarperCollins.

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Like any book, and even more for a book like this, which is, after all, a book on books, it cannot but avail itself of the help of librarians. For this reason, I want to thank the staff of the Library of Philosophy at the University of Padua and all of the places where I have carried out my research.

Finally, I must thank my family and my parents for having always supported me and endured all these years. This book is dedicated to them.

Venice
August 2019

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1

The End of Art and the Resistance of Literature

Contemporary art manifests the peculiarity of the time that defines it. Admittedly, the art of all times expresses the time in which it is produced, but what we call 'contemporary art' reveals its own character with radical evidence and through a clear break with previous art. It does so immediately, at first glance: coming into contact with a work of contemporary art means realising, from the outset, that one is dealing with an expression that belongs to the era in which it has been conceived and that, above all, it is categorically different from all art of the past. The feeling that distinguishes the perception of contemporary art from that of previous eras is that contemporary art embodies the rupture with everything that precedes it. Its existence speaks to a rupture greater in magnitude than that of previous revolutions in art history. If other ruptures also took on the previous eras and stood precisely in opposition to those that came before, here it seems that art has taken a totally different path. It claims to be a definitive and irreversible break, introducing and continuing to introduce something different and new in the field of art by those who produce it and in the perception of the public.

The most common experience of a standard viewer of contemporary art no longer condenses into an act of admiration for something beautiful, but is summarised in a question that, on several levels, tries to understand

the intentions underlying a certain work, the reasons that led the artist to conceive it, the elements that make it a work of art, and the reasons that justify it as art. The experience of those who visit the MoMa in New York or move from one pavilion to the other at the Venice Art Biennale is radically different from those who admire the pictorial masterpieces of Renaissance art at the Louvre in Paris or wander through the ruins of the Parthenon in Athens: in front of a work of art the standard viewer no longer exclaims ‘how beautiful!’, but finds herself wondering ‘what does that mean?’, ‘is that art?’, or more simply ‘what is that thing?’.¹ Surprise, shock, often just disorientation. Something has happened: the exclamation has given way to the question.

The question arises not so much from the obvious diversity of contemporary art with the art of other historical periods, but from the nature of this diversity, which is expressed at various levels, for example: the breaking of the representational and mimetic modes, replaced by or mixed with abstract expressions; the advent of new audio, video or, in recent years, computer technologies, which have made it possible to broaden the expressive capacities and the possibility of technical reproducibility of works of art; the inclusion of art in the processes of industrial and mass society or in the society of entertainment, which profoundly changes its original power; the abandonment of the modalities that tradition has handed down as the acquired typologies of artistic genres, such as painting or sculpture, in favour of new artistic modalities such as performance art, installation art or land art; the introduction of everyday objects or their perceptually exact imitations as artworks; the passage from a dimension where the sensorial-emotional experience is central to one where the rational one is fundamental, specifically that of reflection.

Yayoi Kusama’s installations covered with infinite dots, Bruce Nauman’s neon installations, Marina Abramović’s performances, Jeff Koons’ giant painted steel balloons, Maurizio Cattelan’s irreverent sculptures, Damien Hirst’s animals in formaldehyde or Olafur Eliasson’s artificial atmospheres are just some of the most popular examples of a plural and heterogeneous art. This starts with the historical avant-gardes, with artists such as Marcel Duchamp, runs through the entire twentieth century, crosses countless

¹ Cf. Danto (2003, 6–8).

other experiences, movements and figures such as Andy Warhol or Joseph Beuys, and comes down to today's standard viewer, producing a completely different situation in the world of art. It has never ceased to embody the character of a decisive and, apparently, irreversible fracture compared to the art of previous centuries. If the history of art, from its origins until the end of the nineteenth century, especially until the appearance of inventions such as photography and cinema, follows a path certainly rich in extraordinary changes and revolutionary innovations, but still consistent with an internal logic that allows us to perceive as related artists across the centuries, the twentieth century has seen a multifaceted explosion of artistic expressions that seems to have broken inexorably with that logic.

Even though the artistic experiences just briefly mentioned are already very different from each other, what I want to suggest here is that the recognition of a sharp divide that contemporary art provokes compared to previous art history is familiar and easily perceptible. We can clearly see that most of the theoretical grids with which we interpreted past art have become difficult to apply and are unusable most of the time. The kind of art we have to deal with is something that has once and for all broken the conceptual barriers, hierarchies and genre distinctions to which we were accustomed, allowing us to enter into a 'flow', often difficult to interpret, which manifests itself first of all as contemporary, or as different from what was before.²

It is certainly not just a matter of detecting a change only in the experience made by a standard viewer. This common experience is just the clearest and most easily understandable epiphenomenon of a much deeper transformation. The fracture involves the aesthetic experience of both standard and specialist viewers as well as the mode and conception of artistic practice by artists, the political-institutional organisation of the world of art as well as its own notion. It is a transformation that concerns art in all its aspects and that stands as an epochal step in the course of its history.

²Boris Groys has recently described contemporary art as entering the flow of time. This fluidification of art through avant-garde movements and new technologies places the fate of art on the same level as that of ordinary things, which radically rethinks the entire artistic tradition and breaks the boundaries previously established (first of all those of museums): art in the flow 'engenders its own tradition, the re-enactment of an art event as anticipation and realisation of a new beginning, of a future in which the orders that define our present will lose their power and disappear' (Groys 2016, 7).

To explain this historical-artistic phenomenon, in the theory and philosophy of art of the recent decades, the so-called end-of-art thesis has had renewed success. With reference to its famous origins in Hegel's philosophy, this epochal upheaval was read in terms of the end of a certain narrative, which led to something absolutely different from everything prior. The expression 'end of art' was not, of course, meant to decree the cessation of artistic production (which probably has never had such an expansion as in this last period of history), but a profound change. In the words of the art historian Hans Belting: it 'registers the fact that the end of a tradition, a tradition that had become a canon in its familiar form since modernity, is looming in art as well as in the conceptual images [Denkbildern] of art history' (Belting 1994, 22).³

This kind of analysis, with different accents, has involved various perspectives in the last decades, from the most art-historical one (Belting 1994) to that most addressed to art criticism (Clair 1983; Kuspit 2004), up to the most strictly philosophical (Bürger 1974; Formaggio 1983; Vattimo 1985; García Düttmann 2000). It has also been shown that these positions constitute only the last chapter of a long tradition (Geulen 2002; Vercellone 2013; Vieweg et al. 2015) and it has continued to deepen, even in recent years, with the rediscovery and analysis of the positions that gave rise to this tradition, that of Hegel and the German philosophical context of the time (Werle 2011; Lesce 2017).

The majority of these studies take up art in general and, despite some differences introduced by particular artistic forms, develop a discourse on the end of art through understanding art as a unitary whole. Moreover, in testing the application of the thesis to specific cases, many have turned largely to figurative art, that is to say, to painting and sculpture, for which the quality of the epochal change seems more evident than in other media. The examples taken into consideration to support the end-of-art thesis derive mainly from that context and there is no doubt that the adoption of the thesis as a hermeneutic key to interpreting contemporary figurative art has given remarkable results. A recent example is Robert B. Pippin's *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* (Pippin

³Throughout the book, page numbers for quotations of non-English books are cited as follows: the first number refers to the original text and the second number to the translation. Where the second number is not present, the translation is mine.

2014). In this study, Pippin proposes a Hegelian interpretation of an artistic phenomenon that comes after Hegel's death; namely, the great season of Impressionist painting. With the support of the contemporary art-historical perspectives of Michael Fried and T. J. Clark, and also in confrontation with the philosophical perspective of Martin Heidegger, Pippin discusses the thesis on the end of art, testing it with works by Édouard Manet and Paul Cézanne, that is, figurative art, and in this case pictorial art.

Nevertheless, the thesis on the end of art is mostly directed at art in general, assuming and, in some cases, showing that the decisive phenomena of rupture occurred even for the arts that are not traditionally included among the figurative ones. In fact, examples of deep discontinuity can be found in music, from the dodecaphonic and atonal revolutions of the early twentieth century to the works of experimental and electroacoustic music by composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Bruno Maderna, Luigi Nono, Luciano Berio or even those of aleatoric or chance-controlled music by John Cage, which have radically changed the production and listening of the musical composition. Not to mention here the fracture between so-called cultivated music and popular music, with a great variety of musical subgenres (not at all uncultivated, from jazz to pop music, from rock to film scores), which has been interpreted in terms of a possible end of art. Examples of profound innovation in what was previously conceived of as artistic can be found in dance, from Steve Paxton's contact improvisation expressions to the reformulations of the *Tanztheater*, for example, with Pina Bausch, which reinvent the concepts of choreography and dance, developing the ideas of German Expressionism of the early decades of the twentieth century. Even in architecture one can find signs of a break—here too, developing in extreme terms some of the avant-garde concepts of the early twentieth century—with the works of architects trying to deconstruct the traditional meaning of this art, from Robert Venturi to Paolo Portoghesi, from Frank Gehry to Rem Koolhaas.

In all these artistic contexts, the fracture with everything that came before had different characteristics depending on the specific medium. Each has its own history of passing through this end. And though the end that can be attributed to these specific arts has not been as sharp as that of

the figurative arts,⁴ it nevertheless seems that even for these other arts nothing can ever be as it was. That is to say, the contemporary production of non-figurative art practices seems to necessarily move according to different logics and conceptions compared to the previous ones. The examples cited above are all artistic expressions that have produced a strong sense of rupture and can be included in a discourse on the end of art as a whole. At the landing stage of a long journey through the twentieth century, they declare themselves to be the beginning of something profoundly different from what came before. In many cases innovative, they are something we might find trivially 'strange', but that we clearly recognise as contemporary.

Among all the main arts mentioned above, there is an obvious absence of literature. This is the particular art that will be considered here. The question on which this volume is based is: can we speak of an end of literature in the same terms as we speak of the end of the figurative arts and probably also of the other kinds of art? Does the end of art in general translate without problems into the end of literature or should we make distinctions? Has the same thing occurred in literature or does literature cross its end in completely different ways?

The thesis of this book is that literature is indeed involved in a discourse about its end, but that, at the same time, it interprets its end in a very peculiar way, that is, by resisting it. If, on the one hand, literary art is the subject of considerable revolutions by avant-garde movements and by specific authors, on the other hand, it does not seem—this is the claim of the book—that it has produced a fracture such as to completely upset and transform its own concept, as has happened with the figurative arts and, probably, with the other arts as well. Literature, because of the specific features that characterise it compared to other arts—first of all the linguistic medium that constitutes it—seems to go through the upheavals

⁴In contrast to this reading, however, there have been interventions that have warned against a too univocal reading of the avant-garde movements as producers of final turns: there are, for instance, those who have pointed out the 'aporia of the avant-garde' (Enzensberger 1963); those who stressed the fact that the historical avant-gardes had the merit of unmasking the dynamics of art as an institution based on the principle of autonomy in the bourgeois society, but failed in their attempts to merge art and life, as demonstrated by the institutionalisation of the original critical potential by the neo-avant-gardes (Bürger 1974, 47–54); those who described the avant-garde as an illusory caricature of modernity (Clair 1983, 57–65); and positions that, well before, decreed in a certain sense the 'end' of the avant-gardes (Brandt 2008). For a recent discussion on the aesthetics of the avant-garde and their limits, see Horowitz (2003).

of its end by always remaining and returning to itself. It seems to produce modes of resistance to its end, which, we will see, has always been inherent to it. As an art, literature has always experienced a state of end. It has always had within itself the germs of its end as much as the antibodies to resist it.

In addition to those already mentioned, among the authors who have addressed in recent times the topic of the end of art, perhaps the one who has returned most often to the issue and who has significantly contributed to bringing the thesis of Hegelian derivation back to the centre of attention is Arthur C. Danto. His work, combining a solid philosophical approach with a theory of art history and successful activity as an art critic, has had considerable influence and established itself as one of the most exciting and relevant theories for interpreting the events of contemporary art. Danto's gaze is primarily directed at the figurative arts and, with respect to them, his perspective is undoubtedly of absolute significance and interest. His theory, however, intends to embrace all art as a whole, also beyond the specific field of figurative art. From here, this book takes its starting point, that is to say, from a criticism of the 'transgeneric' claim to the end of art, namely from the claim that the end of art concerns all kinds of art.

1 Danto and the End of Art: A 'Transgeneric' Thesis?

In the *Preface* of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Danto makes a remarkable observation, which will be of decisive importance for the development of the reflections proposed here. Right before the passage we will consider, Danto has just recalled the curious origin of the title of his volume, Muriel Spark's novel *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, where a character wrote a book with the same title as the one Danto would later make his own; moreover, he has described the artistic episodes, namely the art of Duchamp and Warhol, which have permitted him to use that imaginative title for the real philosophical work he is presenting. The artworks of the two giants of twentieth-century art history made it possible to 'transfigure' common objects into art and, by removing the aesthetic, i.e. sensorial-emotional, dimension from artistic appreciation and understanding, have brought art 'in a way, to an end' (Danto 1981, vii). Obviously, this does

not mean a shutdown of artistic production, Danto explains, but rather that art has come to an end ‘in the sense that it has passed over into a kind of consciousness of itself and become, again in a way, its own philosophy’ (Danto 1981, vii). This is something that was outlined in Hegel’s philosophy of history, but that had to wait until the contemporary era, and in particular the 1960s and 1970s, to be fulfilled—as he points out immediately afterwards. And here, with this in the background, we can find the remarkable observation mentioned above:

The problem this book addresses came forward most vividly in what might be called painting-and-sculpture. And so a good many of my examples are drawn from that genre of art. Nevertheless, they can be made to arise *transgenerically*, in all the branches of art: in literature and architecture, in music and dance. [...] More important, if anything I write fails to apply throughout the world of art, I shall consider that a refutation: for this aims at being an analytical philosophy of *art*, even if it may also be read as a sustained philosophical reflection on the painting-and-sculpture of the present time. (Danto 1981, VII, my emphasis)

Danto is saying that the content of the reflections present in his book apply in the first instance to the arts that we can define as ‘figurative’; at the same time, however, he also claims that the scope of these reflections must necessarily be valid for all artistic genres. His perspective is openly aimed at a particular kind of art, but it must be applicable to art in general. Furthermore, he assigns particular importance to this clause, going so far as to argue that it is binding in relation to the cogency of his entire theory. After all, the subtitle of the book is precisely *A Philosophy of Art*, where the term ‘art’ must be taken in an all-inclusive sense.

Strictly speaking, Danto’s clarification refers above all to the specific topic of his book, namely the search for the necessary conditions to identify a work of art as such. However, the tight connection between the conditions for identifying a work of art and the end-of-art thesis—which would become increasingly evident in Danto’s later works—cannot but lead to the problem of whether the end of art, in the terms Danto conceives it, applies to all art as such. In other words, what can be asked is whether the ‘transgeneric’ demand, that here concerns primarily the identification

of artworks, can also apply to the thesis on the end of art, as it is elaborated by Danto. This is precisely the starting point of the present volume.

Before discussing the problem and stating a thesis, it is useful to go back a step, recalling and outlining, at least in general terms, Danto's own interpretation of the end-of-art argument.

As is well known, the decisive event for Danto's reflection on art is his encounter with Andy Warhol's works and above all with the *Brillo Boxes*. An episode that—as he would repeat several times over the following decades⁵—took place for the first time on the occasion of a personal exhibition of the artist in 1964 at the Stable Gallery on East 74th Street in Manhattan. This event led him, a former artist who had never been philosophically involved in art and a philosopher already well known in other philosophical fields, to devote himself almost exclusively to theoretical reasoning about art and, later, also to art criticism.⁶ At that time, what struck Danto most and continued to be the central question in his overall thinking about art was the following problem: 'what makes the difference between a work of art and something not a work of art when there is no interesting perceptual difference between them?' (Danto 1997, 35). In the specific case of Warhol: what makes the artwork titled *Brillo Boxes* and exposed in the art gallery different from its common counterparts, i.e. the abrasive soap-pad packs designed by graphic designer James Harvey, which everyone could buy at the supermarket (Danto 2003, 11–12). It was a problem that brought to the table Leibniz' issue of the indiscernibility of identicals, a topic that had already crossed Danto's mind in other philosophical domains, from epistemology to the theory of action, becoming one of the identifying marks of what can be conceived of as

⁵Danto wrote that he has 'extensively – and perhaps obsessively –' returned to this work over the years (Danto 2003, 3).

⁶Danto had dedicated himself to the philosophical study of areas such as, among others, philosophy of history (*Analytical Philosophy of History*, 1965; then in the extended edition, *Narration and Knowledge*, 1985), epistemology (*Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge*, 1968), the philosophy of action (*Analytical Philosophy of Action*, 1973), with the aim of building a sort of philosophical system based on an analytical approach (however, in an original and unusual way for the American academic scene of the time, he had also written two monographs on philosophers of the continental tradition such as Nietzsche in 1965 and Sartre in 1975). The importance of this episode led him to devote most of his later books and contributions to the philosophy of art and to become an art critic for the magazine *The Nation* from 1984 to 2009. For an overall presentation of his philosophical career from an autobiographical point of view, see Danto (2013b).

a proper philosophical system (Andina 2010, 27–73 and 21–65; Rollins 2012, 1; Snyder 2018, 150–153). In general, he considered his encounter with the *Brillo Boxes* so crucial, because there he realised that an artwork, which at a perceptual level was identical to a common object, excluded from the conditions for the identification of it as an artwork all those aesthetic properties, i.e. perception-related properties such as beauty or harmony, that had ambiguously accompanied the notion of ‘art’ over the centuries. The perceptive and sensory aspects that had characterised the discipline of aesthetics, even in its very name from an etymological point of view, were not so decisive and had to give way, in the arduous attempt to understand the essence of art, to a philosophy of art that considered other aspects (Danto 2003, 86). In this light, he would later delineate the necessary (and not sufficient) conditions for the identification of an artwork, which over time he condensed into the two conditions of being about something and embodying a meaning.⁷ Bringing Warhol’s work together with Duchamp’s, and in general the demands of the artistic movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Pop Art, Fluxus, Minimal Art, etc.) with those of the historical avant-gardes of the first part of the twentieth century, Danto considered these transformations to be epochal. Something has happened, something has changed.

Still, the historical perspective in his philosophical discourse on art was yet to come. In fact, we would have to wait almost twenty years before he places these reflections in a framework of a philosophy of art history that would have at its core a reinterpretation of Hegel’s end-of-art thesis. Danto’s reference to Hegel is complex and articulated. If at first Danto dealt with Hegel in his book on the philosophy of history in a critical way, when he later turned his attention to the field of the philosophy of art he took into great consideration the thought of the German philosopher and came to define himself as a ‘born-again Hegelian’ (Danto 1992, 9). Danto’s reinterpretation of Hegel’s thought—an approach that does not

⁷In the *Transfiguration*, six conditions can be found: works of art must 1. have a subject (be about something); 2. be intentionally caused representations with a specific point of view; 3. be open to interpretation; 4. have a historical contextualisation that allows them to be identified as such; 5. have an elliptical or metaphorical structure; 6. have a style. Over time, conditions have stabilised at two (1. aboutness; 2. embodied meaning). In his last work, *What art is*, to these two Danto has added a third new condition, that of being a ‘wakeful dream’ (Danto 2013a, 1–52). For a discussion on Danto’s definition see, for example, Carroll (2012b).

come from a Hegel scholar but that has managed to revive in a personal but fascinating hermeneutical proposal some moments of his philosophy of art—has aroused great debate and will be discussed more extensively, in relation to his adherence to the Hegelian word, in Chapter 4.⁸

Danto has repeatedly modified and enriched his interpretation of the end of art, but in its various moments and stratifications one can find a basic coherence.⁹ Going to the heart of the matter, he identified in the transformations of contemporary art the realisation of what Hegel—according to Danto's vision—would only have anticipated. Art had in fact come to an end in the sense that it underwent an epochal change: it had become a question for itself, a kind of self-reflective undertaking, a theoretical reasoning on itself—in short, philosophy.

Danto inserts this view into a philosophical-historical framework, based on the notion of 'episode' or 'narrative', that is, of an epochal arc teleologically oriented to a goal.¹⁰ He identifies two 'narratives' or 'episodes' within the history of Western art. A first 'narrative' began from the dawn of modern Western painting art history with Giotto and Cimabue, a phase that Danto calls 'Vasarian narrative', named after the painter, architect and author of the *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. Characteristic of this very long period is the challenge of verisimilitude, the constant approach of art to reality through the mimetic imitation of the latter by the former. With the advent of photography and, above all, cinema at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, approximation to reality becomes, according to Danto, complete, and this first narrative reaches its end. This artistic moment is replaced by a second one, which he calls the 'Greenbergian narrative', from the name of the renowned American art critic Clement Greenberg. This second period describes the moment of American Abstract Expressionism

⁸In this regard, a 'Hegelian turn' has been spoken of as regards the development in the thought of Danto (Solomon and Higgins 2012). For a first approach to the question of the relationship with Hegelian philosophy, see Hilmer (1998), Andina (2010, 90–104 and 100–114), Gethmann-Siefert (2013), Carrier (2013), Rush (2013), Solomon and Higgins (2013), Gethmann-Siefert (2014), Iannelli (2014a, 2015), Houlgate (2015), Dürr (2015), and Lesce and Sapugnano (2018).

⁹Cf. Cascales (2018).

¹⁰For the importance of history in Danto's philosophy of art and the discussion of the limits, see Margolis (1997) and Carroll (1997).

where art focuses on the potentialities of its medium (Danto 1997, 125–126). When the consideration of the artistic medium and the work on it reach their limit, something takes place that Danto judges to be a traumatic fracture: art, which throughout its history involved mimetic intent (Vasarian episode) and which in the first half of the twentieth century proposed a reflection on its own means (Greenbergian episode), moved from the sensorial and emotional dimension to the conceptual level to the point of becoming reflection itself. The history of art has embarked on a path of ‘philosophisation’ that has pushed the work of art to ask questions, to become a question and, in so doing, to leave the form that had been traditional and canonical until then, exploding in a multiplicity of possibilities. Moreover, encroaching on the domain of philosophy, art has posed problems upon itself, forcing philosophers to chase it. At this point, art reaches an end that corresponds to the very end of art. Art experiences an irreversible turning point, a trauma, which coincides with the advent of the twentieth-century avant-gardes, especially of the second part of the century. Art enters a phase which Danto identifies as ‘post-historical’ and which corresponds to the philosophisation of art with a consequent liberation from any sort of narrative. This is the contemporary age, based on pluralism and freedom, and on the impossibility for art to be as it was before: after Duchamp, Warhol, and Beuys, nothing can ever be the same.¹¹

Adding the epochal context to his analysis of the artwork, Danto balances in a challenging but captivating way essentialist investigation and historical perspective (Danto 1997, 95). With great effort and determination, he tries to consider these two levels together, even in their possible interrelationships.¹² The conditions Danto outlines for the artwork have to be universal and necessary, that is to say, they have the ambition of being valid at all times and at all latitudes. At the same time, artworks have a history; they emerge and are collocated in a temporal process that at a specific moment in this history—and especially in the history of figurative art—prepare for the identification of such conditions. There art

¹¹Cf. Vercellone (2013, 88).

¹²The relationship between essentialism and historicism has been discussed in Kelly (1998), Carroll (2012a), and Ankersmit (2013).

reaches its end, radically transforming its prerogatives and breaking with all kinds of historical-artistic narrative.

Given this brief overview of Danto's interpretation of the end-of-art thesis and noting its rather persuasive character with respect to what he calls 'painting-and-sculpture', the question from which the present study begins can be summed up as follows: having assumed the specificity in the historical development of this specific art, can an irreversible turn towards a philosophisation of art also apply to all the arts? And particularly: can the end of (figurative) art, as conceived by Danto, also apply to literary artworks?

In more than one contribution, Noël Carroll raises a similar problem when he notices the ambiguity of Danto's end-of-art thesis and says that it 'appears to be advocated as a theory about painting, or at least the visual or fine arts, but on occasion, Danto seems to think that it applies to art in general' (Carroll 2013, 442).¹³ Carroll questions the possibility of finding cases of indiscernible objects among the other arts—he mentions John Cage's music, the Judson Dance movement, and some performance art—and, more generally, expresses doubts concerning the limitation of the discussion about the essence of art to the problem of the identity of indiscernibles. In addition, he contests the implicit identification that, in his opinion, Danto establishes between figurative art and the avant-garde. Carroll attributes this conceptual shift to the fact 'that cinema brought about an epochal identity crisis for painting in a way that was more traumatic than the identity crisis suffered by any other' (Carroll 1998, 22). Above all, he focuses on the fact that the reason Danto assigns the end of art to painting and sculpture seems to derive from their non-verbal nature. Painting and sculpture represent appearance and, as long as the discussion on the essence of art is tied to perception, the painter or sculptor is able to take part in the debate; when the essence of art can only originate from two indiscernible objects, then the figurative artist no longer has the possibility of articulating her position from within the perceptive level. She is forced to leave her own language and enter the domain of 'analysis and argument' (Carroll 2013, 442), that is, philosophy. Carroll doubts the fact

¹³Doubts about the problematic nature of Danto's ambition that his philosophy of art, especially with respect to the definition of art, is valid in general, in every time, place and for every form of art, are also expressed by Carrier (2007).

that figurative art, especially contemporary figurative art, radically excludes the possibility of hosting words, and claims that the discourse in any case does not seem to work for ‘literature, theatre, opera, cinema, video, song and, in fact, much performance art as well as some postmodern dance’ (Carroll 2013, 443). The counterexample that supports his argument is a concrete literary one: Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, an artwork that reflects on the nature of its fictional characters and on its own essence.

In one of his most recent answers to Carroll, Danto observes that the problem of the application of the end of art outside the domain of visual arts is ‘an important question’ and, discussing some of the possible cases of indiscernible objects in other arts among those proposed by Carroll, finally states: ‘[i]n any case, my interest was in the visual arts, and it was enough for me to feel that if it *could* be shown that the other arts were like the visual arts in the conceptual respects that concerned me, there was no special reason for going further’ (Danto 2013c, 455). One of the cases on which his reply dwells is that of literature and, in particular, of the novel. The feature that Danto emphasises of the novel (and literary artworks in general) is its metaphorical value in relation to the reader: the novel tells stories that are reproductions, sort of doublings, of the reader’s real life, and provides, according to Danto, ‘a good example of what it is like to live in an end-of-art situation’ (Danto 2013c, 455). This last consideration, necessarily brief given the occasion (as a reply to the contributions dedicated to him for the series *The Library of Living Philosophers*), may perhaps appear quick and partly superficial. Actually, it is centrally significant that, in responding to the problem of the transgeneric character of the end of art, Danto’s attention shifts, among the various arts, especially to literature (and even to the novel), because he apparently identifies the literary artwork as one of the most problematic cases. Danto’s argument is based on the idea that the novel, thanks to its verbal medium used as a metaphor, somehow reproduces the situation of two indiscernible entities, the literary artistic one and the real one. However, if the question of the end of art is a problem not only of an ontological nature, but also of a historical one—concerning a historical passage in which art has questioned its own nature and has been articulated as a reasoning about itself—then we can wonder how this aspect works with an art such as literature. In its very essence, it seems to have

always had a metaphorical stance towards real life and, because of its verbal medium, it already has in itself the potential, as Carroll notes, to articulate philosophical reasoning. It is of absolute interest, therefore, to ask whether the thesis on the end of art, as conceived by Danto, can be applied to literature, whether literature has experienced a fracture similar to that of the figurative arts, whether a sort of reflection on the nature of literature has taken place, and in what terms this hypothetical philosophisation has occurred.

It is reasonable to initially concentrate on Danto's reflection on literature and the ways he uses literary cases, in order to see if it is possible to already find some answers in his philosophy.

2 The Resistance of Literature

Although Danto certainly focuses on the art that he summarises in the label 'painting-and-sculpture', he quite often takes literary art into consideration. He devotes two contributions—later to become chapters of the book *The Philosophical Disenchantment of Art*—specifically to literature, namely *Philosophy as/and/of Literature* and *Philosophizing Literature*, and occasionally takes into consideration literary artworks in other books as well.

The uses he proposes of literary cases are the most varied. In addition to ornamental use, the search for elements of wisdom in literature, and support—in an extrinsic way—for his philosophical arguments,¹⁴ Danto goes deeper only into the ontological side of literature. In his general attempt to combine the ontological and the historical levels, as far as literature is concerned, he focuses more on the former, leaving the latter often in the background. This is due to the fact that in his analysis literary examples are mostly functional to other contexts of a more ontological nature and that we cannot find in Danto a proper and developed argumentation on the

¹⁴See, for instance, Rilke in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Danto 1981, 15) or Yeats in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (Danto 1986, 43). Other examples, among many others, are: Odysseus and Achilles (Danto 1986, 134); Petrarch (Danto 1997, 23); Shakespeare's Amleth (Danto 1986, 58); Prospero from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (Danto 1981, 22); Orwell (Danto 1997, 134); and Auden (Danto 1986, 142).

end of literature from a historical point of view. Nonetheless, this preference for the ontological side of literary artworks can be symptomatic and it is helpful to analyse it, at least at this introductory level.

An emblematic case to mention here in order to explain Danto's approach to literature is his frequently discussed considerations on the short story *Pierre Menard, author of the Quixote*, included in Borges' *Ficciones*.¹⁵

Danto examines this literary artwork closely, because in it the problem of two indiscernible objects is clearly exposed. In this case, both are artistic objects, totally identical to each other, yet radically different. The problem is well known and concerns the identity of a literary artwork and its copies: the (fictitious) contemporary French author Pierre Menard rewrites, word for word, some passages from Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and, in so doing, creates a work that is totally different from the Spanish writer's masterpiece, because the author, his nationality, his time, and his intentions differ from the original (Danto 1981, 34–39).

What interests me here is not Danto's position, but an aspect of his approach. Danto discusses the relationship between the work of Menard and that of Cervantes in order to draw important considerations for his theory of art in general. Despite considering some contextual aspects relevant to his own argument (Menard and Cervantes wrote at different times; the national context was different), Danto does not consider Borges' story as a story written by Borges, the extraordinary twentieth-century Argentinian author. Put differently, what Danto does not inquire into is the work written by a real contemporary author in his own real 'artworld', i.e. set in an art-historical and philosophical-historical context that could recall the problem of the end of art. Danto draws from Borges a sort of 'laboratory case' or what in philosophy could be called a 'thought experiment': the ontological relationship between the fictional Menard's artwork and the real Cervantes' artwork has no real reference to the concreteness of the actual literary-historical context that produced it. The historical relationship between Cervantes and Menard takes into consideration a historical

¹⁵The topic of the ontology of the literary artwork in Danto, with reference to Borges' *Menard*, has been addressed countless times. For one of the first discussions, see Tilghman (1982).

dimension between the two authors, but given the fictionality of the second, remains on a level that is in some ways too abstract to develop a real reflection of a historical nature. Danto found in Borges a writer, whose ‘contribution to the ontology of art is stupendous’ (Danto 1981, 36), and treats him, one might say, as a philosopher. If Danto had remained in an actual historical perspective, he would have had to discuss his theory not with regard to Menard’s relationship with literary history (or Cervantes), but with regard to Borges’ relationship with literary history, namely with an author who writes in a specific historical time a story about the essence of literature, setting in this way his discourse in an effective historical dimension or even in a narrative. In this sense, Danto’s analysis of this story is not a philosophical reasoning on literary history, but becomes the citation of a basically abstract example from the literary field, which is functional to the general theory of art or, better, to the theory of painting and sculpture. Clearly, contextualising literature within a discourse on the end of art (let alone dealing with the end of literature) was not Danto’s aim on this occasion, and even less so in a work such as the *Transfiguration* in which Danto’s reinterpretation of the end-of-art thesis is still at a germinal level. Yet the instance of Borges could be analysed within an epochal perspective such as that of the end of art. One could ask questions such as: does Borges’ story carry out a process of self-reflection on what a literary artwork is or on what literature is? Does it force the reader to ask philosophical questions about the status of artworks? If Borges’ story comes at the end of (literary) art, how does Borges’ artwork activate a self-reflective process of Hegelian derivation? If Borges’ artwork participates in the end of literature, will literature after Borges ever (or rather, has it been able to) retrace with the same credibility and power the paths followed by literature before Borges?

Again, Danto’s discussion of Pierre Menard’s famous instance undoubtedly aims to achieve other results and appears in a work such as *Transfiguration*, in which Danto’s theory of the end of art is not yet developed, even if—as we have seen above—the decisive elements are all already present. Nonetheless, his approach in this specific circumstance is significant, because it denotes a more ontological rather than historical attention to literary works. In the case of literature, Danto points to the essence by risking losing sight of the epoch.

Another example, again proposed in the *Transfiguration*, allows us to take a few steps forward. It is an example in many ways central, because in the first place it tries to deal with the problem of the medium that Carroll also advanced. Unlike the figurative arts and, one might add, all other artistic forms, literature is constituted by and uses a verbal medium: the linguistic dimension potentially allows literary artworks to reflect on and discuss, from the inside, their own nature. Danto himself seems to be aware of the exceptional character of the literary artwork and actually tries to refute the objection that his arguments apply to the mimetic arts but not to the diegetic ones, firstly literature.

In this case, he tries to show how the necessary, but not sufficient, conditions of his own identification of an artwork can also be valid for a novel. He introduces the difference between a case of discursive language contemplated literally—for example a newspaper article or a forensic report—and a case of discursive language considered artistically. The former, in the translation from an art genre to the other carried out by Danto, would correspond to the commercial Brillo boxes and the latter to their artistic counterpart, made by Warhol. The example he proposes is Truman Capote's nonfiction novel *In Cold Blood*, a novel that notoriously presents a detailed account of the fourfold murder of the Clutter family, whose author 'invented nothing, or at least intended to invent nothing, in contrast with the typical novelist who invents characters, episodes, situations, and plots' and 'used the technologies of what today is called investigative journalism' (Danto 1981, 144). For Danto, Capote's novel offers an extraordinary example of two indiscernible objects within the literary art form, and its greatness lies precisely in the fact that it is an artwork that presents itself, at the same time, as identical to a common object, a 'commonplace' (Danto 1981, 146) like a newspaper article or a forensic report.

For the line of argument developing here, the example of Capote's novel seems to manifest greater complexity and depth than that of Borges, because it presents a relationship between a real artwork and a real object. Nevertheless, at least two complications arise. The first one: the translation from a work of figurative art to a work of literary art causes a significant shift on an ontological level with regard to the issue of two indiscernible objects. Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* and even more Duchamp's *Fountain* present a more

immediate perceptual identity: they are works of art that are identical at a perceptual level to objects taken from reality. Because of the medium of language, on the contrary, Capote's novel is an indiscernible object compared to a newspaper article or a forensic report, and not directly compared to reality. It seems that the novel is indiscernible from a non-artistic object which is undoubtedly real, but in fact the novel represents reality at a much more mediated level compared to not only a Duchamp ready-made (i.e. an actual object transfigured into a work of art), but also to a Warhol artwork. The latter, although not materially identical to reality (they are not the original Hervey's carton boxes, but painted and inked wooden reproductions), still replicates reality in a perceptually immediate way. Capote's novel is the artistic counterpart of an other, although real, non-artistic representation of reality, not directly of reality described by the novel and by the newspaper article or the forensic report. Compared to cases taken from figurative art (but also in relation, for instance, to the indiscernibility between a musical artwork by Cage and the noise of everyday life), here the identification between a literary artwork and reality seems to be, from an ontological point of view, at least of a second order. There is an additional ontological step concerning the representational level of the newspaper or the forensic report. The literary artwork transfigures reality, even in a borderline case like Capote's novel, differently and in a more mediated way than figurative art and many other arts, such as music but also dance or performance art. In short, the linguistic medium seems to attribute to the literary artwork a radical difference.

The second problem with Danto's approach to Capote's novel recalls the issue, already formulated in the case of Borges' story, of Danto's predilection for the ontological aspect in his treatment of literary artworks. Again, Danto is concerned with isolating the necessary conditions for the identification of the artwork. Although he concentrates here on the literary artwork as such and his discussion is not indexed exclusively to figurative art, here too what seems to be missing is a historical-literary framing of the case. The ontological aspect continues to be central and seems to prevail, whereas history recedes into the background. Can *In Cold Blood* be considered at the peak of a narrative that ends? Has Capote's novel determined a turning point in the history of contemporary literature such

that, through a philosophisation of the literary artwork, nothing is the same as before?

Let us assume that historical reasoning is present between Danto's lines and try to quickly outline a sort of completion. We can, for example, consider *In Cold Blood* or the nonfiction novel in general as the last episode of a long narrative of realism in modern literature and the novel; a narrative that has had many representatives, such as Flaubert, Balzac, Zola, Dickens, Tolstoy, just to name a few. Let us suppose that, by participating in the avant-garde times, Capote is actually Warhol's counterpart for literary art: Capote seems to be a good candidate to represent the end of literature in the terms proposed by Danto, but at the same time, his work has not caused a fracture as powerful, definitive and irreversible in the history of literature as the one that took place for figurative art. The tradition of the nonfiction novel—and this will be one of the hypotheses of this book—is certainly a significant mode of literature's ending, if we want to identify a possible way among others through which literature faces its own end. Nevertheless, it seems that literature, precisely because of its linguistic medium and its ontological difference from other arts, resists such an unambiguously oriented end and introduces further complications with respect to the identification of a univocal end.

In order to remain, for the moment, within the ambit of Danto's framework, there is an example in *Transfiguration* that provides further insights. On the one hand, this example can confirm that the historical dimension is less considered by Danto as far as the literary artwork is concerned and, on the other hand, can provide us with further insights into the complexity of identifying a possible end to literature. The example is Euripides' theatre which, at least at this level, can be considered a case of literature. In a passage preceding the discussion of Capote's novel, Danto speaks of the 'Euripidean dilemma', in which he recognises the mimetic approach of literary art to reality in the works of the Greek author who consistently used everyday life as the main topic for his plays. In a move that sounds quasi-Nietzschean, Danto sees in Euripides' work the fulfilment of the mimetic programme, that is, of a moment in which 'one has produced something so like what is to be encountered in reality that, being just like reality, the question arises as to what makes it art' (Danto 1981, 29). The essentialist abstraction that dominates Danto's analyses of literary works

leads him to project the fundamental problem—that of the indiscernibility between common objects and art objects—onto the dramatic works of Greek antiquity. This loses sight of the specific historical changes of the twentieth century where, in his analysis, the end of art takes place. Danto's ontological predilection can certainly explain this shift, but perhaps this example tells us something more about the question of the end of literature—something that has to do with the metaphorical value of the novel that Danto gestures towards in his above-mentioned response to Carroll's objection. If the metaphorical element—obviously, with lesser or greater realism—is what allows literature, and in that case the novel, to create artworks that are indiscernible reproductions of everyday life, then one could go so far as to say that much of the literary production in history is a great undertaking of producing indiscernible objects. Precisely in its most intimate structure, literature seems to have always relied on metaphorical language to duplicate life. In these terms, the problem grows perhaps too large and the metaphorical value of literature as a vehicle for the production of the indiscernible risks being a generic and insufficient solution. Certainly, the linguistic aspect allows for a reproduction of reality that is in some ways greater or at least more articulated than that of the other arts, and its metaphorical (one could perhaps say artistic) use has always been part of literature. In this sense, Danto's reading of Capote and Euripides according to his end-of-art thesis implies that the end of art has belonged to the literary artwork since time immemorial. Moreover, the same linguistic aspect is what brings literature closer to the possibility of articulating with 'analysis and arguments', as Carroll says, a philosophical reasoning of literature about itself. Relying on this last aspect of the literary medium, one can wonder whether a philosophisation in terms of an end of literature can also be found in other ways for literature. Here also, Danto's work offers some suggestions.

Some time after the publication of the *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, in one of the two essays on literature, and in a place in Danto's work where the discourse on the end of art finds its first relevant advancements, we find particularly significant considerations where Danto explicitly integrates the literary artwork into a philosophical-historical context.

To situate the specific claims we will be concerned with, two premises are necessary. The essay at stake is *Philosophizing Literature* and, like the other

essay *Philosophy as/and/of Literature*, it does not explicitly consider literature in terms of the end-of-art thesis, but rather positions it in relation to philosophy and the boundaries between the two disciplines. Furthermore, even though they are consistent with Danto's philosophical framework and constitute contributions of absolute interest, these essays appear to be of a more occasional nature and less close to the heart of Danto's discourse on art. Nevertheless, in his investigation into the boundaries between a literary and philosophical work, we find Danto's historical insights into the literature of his time.

In the pages in question, Danto is trying to determine the above-mentioned difference between literature and philosophy and, taking as an illustration George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, describes the ontological status of a novel in terms of an embodied idea, an embodied meaning. In doing so, he makes the literary artwork, to be such, satisfy one of the conditions that, together with aboutness, identify art. In general, this feature is valid for any time, without a chronological determination that precedes or follows some particular turning point in the history of literature. This is the ontological-essentialist side of Danto's analysis.

The specific cases under consideration, however, are novels that do not embody just any idea, but the very idea of embodiment. Such novels not only illustrate the idea of incarnation through their presence, that is, by being artworks that metaphorically embody an idea. More deeply, they embody the very idea of the novel, powerfully undertaking a process of self-reflection. At this point, Danto seems to associate this kind of novel with a historical contextualisation, with modernity (in the sense of contemporaneity) and, one might possibly say, also with the 'post-historical' era:

There are novels that seek to embody the idea of the novel, and if that is the idea of embodiment, then these novels embody that idea: but this is a special class of highly self-reflexive works, these days more frequently encountered than in Eliot's time. It may be a definition of modernity that the modern novel is philosophical in this way. (Danto 1986, 181)

In this passage, Danto attributes to the literary artworks of the modern period and of his own time, namely, the time after the end of art, a sort

of philosophisation that becomes a possible key element to determining and understanding its historical location. Not only does figurative art experience a decisive turning point that leads it to reflect on itself so much that it becomes a reflection itself, but this kind of process also involves literature as an artwork that increasingly embodies the idea of itself, the idea of an artwork that embodies an idea, the idea of the embodiment of a meaning.

If we consider this passage further, the profile of the proposed philosophisation is outlined in a very interesting way. In the development of his argumentation, Danto keeps reflecting on the relationship between literature and philosophy: he dwells on the fact that intuition concerns much more the former than the latter and that literature must in general be able to carry out a sort of metaphorical identification with the reader. In order to do this, 'literature cannot stray very far from the structures that define the life of those who read novels: love, jealousy, friendship, adventure, conflict and crisis, the tight corner of the human soul, death, family, childhood, memory, betrayal and loss, sacrifice, happy endings, romance, duty, and meaning. And sex and work and ideals' (Danto 1986, 184–185). It belongs precisely to the essence of literature, by virtue of its metaphorical value, that it reproduces at least in part the world of those who read it, namely the non-artistic world, the real world. Nevertheless, in the contemporary age Danto notes an increase in the process of literature's philosophisation, which he previously attributed to a generic modernity. Here is how he describes it:

Now I can see an artist growing restless with these constraints [the structures that define the life of those who read novels], wanting to slip free of the common experience, not in the sense of writing about sex in distant galaxies, where we inevitably carry with us the values and preferences and possibilities of our own dear planet, but in wanting to be philosophical about what after all defines one as an artist – writing, say. A lot of contemporary literature aims at that.

And it achieves its aims in embodying ideas about writing, but in so doing it addresses its readers as readers, and not as men and women with the sorts of problems and questions the great writers took as the essence of their art. It is as though the reader were addressed as one reduced to the competences involved in the structuring or destructuring of texts, and as

though texts were about nothing much but themselves, and the boundaries of the library or the classroom become the boundaries of life. (Danto 1986, 185)

Danto deepens the terms of what he considers a significant trend in contemporary literature. He identifies a sort of increasingly widespread philosophisation that takes literature away from the reproduction of common experience, not by trivially recreating ordinary situations in paradoxical contexts, but by intervening—we could say both formally and in terms of content—in the very conception of one's own writing, and doing so in philosophical ways. He points this out in a critical manner: against the tendency that aims to transform literature into a kind of philosophy or literary theory, he advocates for the fact that the boundary between them cannot be erased. The targets of his polemical tone here are the academic circles of structuralist and deconstructionist derivation, which were influencing a good part of contemporary literature. Nonetheless, Danto seems to identify this philosophisation as a matter of fact, and the features of it appear particularly interesting: on the one hand, there is a departure from the mere description of real life, of everyday life, by and through literature; on the other hand, there emerges a theoretical reflection of literature on itself that tries to remodel its own forms and concept. This is a deviation from the course of previous literature, which consists of a break with reality from the point of view of a new shaping of the literary artwork through its self-philosophisation. It is the reformulation, if not the rejection, of reality through philosophisation and, in this way, a renewal of the very idea and form of literature. In other words, it seems that a possible end of literature of a totally opposite kind to the realism that produces indiscernibles, as in the case of nonfiction novels, is taking shape, an end that takes place through a reasoning on literature as such that uses linguistic means to unhinge the literary structures of the past. An end that takes advantage of the medium that is proper to literature, i.e. language, using its power to produce analysis and arguments about itself.

Beyond the critical tones and without explicitly opening the discourse on the end of art, Danto outlines a philosophisation of literature which certainly has different connotations from the one seen above. At the same time, this philosophisation of literature remains substantially faithful to

the coherence of some decisive lines of Danto's general thought: there is a moment in historical-literary development that corresponds to a self-reflection of the literary artwork on itself, on its being an artwork and on its being literature. This moment can induce a crucial fracture and end up in a traumatic change. The mode of literature's ending is radically opposed to that of the production of indiscernibles: if in that case there was an approach of literary art to reality, in this case literary art distances itself from reality in terms of an internal reflection and an attempt to reformulate what has traditionally been conceived as literature. In spite of everything, it is a philosophisation that can be read as a sort of end of literature and, to some extent, it can be compared to the one he attributes to painting and sculpture.

In this case, Danto describes a kind of literature that, just to recognise itself as contemporary, tries to remove itself from the canons. To do this, it aims at a sort of exasperation of the reflexive, cerebral or philosophical aspects in the contents, structures and forms of its presentation. Although we find here admittedly a historical contextualisation, there is still a lack of concrete references to specific literary artworks. Danto's reasoning remains based on generic sentences. Nonetheless, we can recognise a typology of experimental literature, which in Danto's time and still today appears under the concept of 'postmodern literature'. A kind of literature that, through reasoning about itself, plays with and even destroys the styles and forms that preceded it. A kind of literature that tries to break down boundaries. A kind of literature that attempts to get out of the forms, conventions and notions that have characterised it until then. A sort of philosophisation that—as will be seen below—seems to be shared also by scholars who do not refer to Danto, such as Robert Pippin or to some extent William Marx. In this case too, one can ask whether this typology of self-reflection has produced an irreversible fracture and whether an end of literature of this kind is comparable to that which has taken place in the field of figurative art.

The philosophisation exemplified by postmodern experimentation can certainly be read as a significant trend, if not one of the dominant ones. The shift towards a philosophical frame is, generally speaking, more evident in this case than in that of the indiscernible nonfiction novel. Moreover, the very impulse towards a fracture with what has been before seems more

decisive and visible. It may therefore seem a more appropriate and credible realisation of the end of literature. However, the mere presence of a counterexample to postmodern experimentation that we find in the genre of the nonfiction novel, a literature that tends towards ordinariness, suggests that, even in the face of fracture, modern literature puts up resistance to its ultimate end. Given these elements, I will try to understand the specific attitude of literature towards its own end and, to do so, I will also look beyond Danto.

3 After Literature?

That an artistic form has a different history from another one can be perceived as a trivial issue. It is equally trivial that in some cases, as in the case of the avant-gardes of the twentieth century, convergences between the arts occur. Surely the upheavals of art as a whole in the last century have involved with greater or lesser strength all forms of art and the label of the end of art, variously conceived, has powerfully described this turn. The description of this shift as contributing a philosophical connotation to art is also persuasive and generally agreed upon.

What is called into question here is whether, in these times of crisis, the arts have behaved and are all behaving in the same way. The case of literature, precisely because of its linguistic medium, is paradigmatic in this sense, because the construction of narratives and the production of epochal transformations within its history seem, at least in part, more complex and articulated than what happens in the figurative arts.

If one looks at the concrete literary production of the last century and today, there is no doubt that much effort on the part of literary artworks goes towards philosophisation: a self-reflection of literature on its status and definition and an attempt to escape from established patterns. There have been moments in the history of recent literature that have represented great or enormous experimentations in this sense. This ranges from individual artists, such as Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*, to historical avant-garde (Expressionism, Dadaism, Futurism, Imaginism) through the neo-avant-garde (French *Nouveau Roman*, the Italian *Gruppo 63*) to the proposals of the contemporary postmodern novel. Like the other art forms, literature

too has experimented with historical passages centred on the search for new paths beyond ordinary life and the usual ways of expressing it. In most cases, these new ways correspond to the perception of a novelty that gives these artistic expressions the character of being contemporary.

No matter how extraordinary and relevant they have been, these artistic practices seem not have produced for literature a definitive and, above all, irreversible rupture like the one produced in the figurative arts. The breakdown produced by these experiences has not led to a widespread philosophisation—a general escape from ordinary patterns—of the subsequent history of literature nor to a pluralism that is completely extraneous to the previous historical-literary narratives, as has happened to the figurative arts. To put it succinctly, the recognition of a Duchamp or a Warhol with regard to literature does not seem so obvious.

In fact, an equally large part of this production, like before, does not seem to pose the problem of its philosophisation nor does it reject usual forms and contents. It continues to tell stories through the stylistic elements and contents consolidated by tradition while remaining—this is important—entirely within the circuit of the contemporary literary art-world. The consolidated genre structure of the nonfiction novel, while appearing to philosophers and theorists as a philosophical claim about indiscernibles, can also be read, in its attention to ordinary life, as a sign of literature's opposition to postmodern experimentation, a sign of resistance to leaving common reality behind through experimentation.

There is a point to make here. 'Literature' is a term that contains many things, many forms, and many genres: from lyrical poems to theatrical dramas, from epic sagas to novels, up to and perhaps including the lyrics of songs. Even within the large family of literature, there can be significant differences in the production of historical narratives and ways of dealing with the great epochal changes. Everything that will be said in this book about the end of literature and the resistance it opposes to its end has the aspiration to work for literature generally understood, especially in comparison with other arts. However, when specific cases are analysed, more—if not almost total—attention will be given to the genre of the novel. In addition to the obvious reasons of space, this choice has methodological and conceptual reasons.

As will be discussed below, a reading that is entirely consistent with the Hegelian position should take more account of drama, which is the systematically higher and final stage of his treatment of literature. In Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art* tragedy and, to some extent, especially comedy, are the literary genres closest to the end of literature. This is a path that can be followed (and in some ways has already been taken) and could certainly lead to considerable theoretical gains. However, the choice made in this study is different. I think it is more fruitful to focus on the novel because in it the question of the end seems to be more compelling than in other genres, so much so as to produce the distinguishable tradition of the end of the novel. This is an outcome that is not extensively developed in Hegel's reasoning and derives rather from the fortune that the genre of the novel had in the two centuries following his death, a fortune that probably went well beyond his expectations. Nevertheless, it is precisely through his philosophy that we can find the conceptual framework for interpreting this phenomenon. The famous description in Hegel's *Lectures* of the novel as a 'modern epic' opens the possibility of interpreting this literary genre as one of the most representative, in its changes and contradictions, of the relationship between literature and modernity. One could go so far as to say that, because the character of modernity is inherent in its very structure, the birth of the novel itself represents a mode of literature's end. This interpretation, therefore, does not limit itself to only reading the formal composition of a genre. The point is, in a Hegelian way, to account for how form and content are intrinsically united. This is precisely what the genre of the novel does in the way it relates literature and modernity, literature and its end. Starting from strongly Hegelian considerations on the novel and taking note of the subsequent development of this genre, which produces a specific tradition concerning its end, I will concentrate on concrete articulations of the resistances of literature to its end.

By departing from Hegelian philosophy through the means of Hegelian philosophy itself, the proposal here is to read literature's end from the perspective of the genre that, after Hegel's death, most manifested a relationship with its end. Robert Pippin, in his already mentioned reading of the Impressionist painting of the late nineteenth century, effectively speaks of Hegel as 'the theorist of modernism, *malgré lui* and *avant la lettre*' (Pippin 2014, 38). Though with different objectives and contents,

the methodological choice of this study is partly similar: it is a question of describing a development of art after the historical Hegel and probably not entirely consistent with his original proposal (*malgré lui*), in order to bring out the possibility of interpreting this outcome through the arguments present in his own philosophy (*avant la lettre*). In this sense, it is not, therefore, a book directly on Hegel's philosophy of art, but on the end of literature through a hermeneutic proposal deriving from his philosophy of art. Two centuries after the historical Hegel and through Hegel's concepts, it identifies the most challenging test bed in the novel.

It is possible that, by shifting attention to other genres, resistances to the end are less evident: the blows of the artistic avant-gardes seem to have left more radical and definitive traces in other genres, such as lyrics (Guillaume Apollinaire's calligrams, Tristan Tzara's Dadaist experimental poetries or the Cubo-Futurist and revolutionary ones by Vladimir Majakovskij) or dramas (from Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre to the Theatre of the Absurd by Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco or to Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty). Yet despite this, many contemporary poets still use a rigid codified metric without deeply considering new reformulations of the genre as well as the many pieces of non-experimental theatre that are still successfully produced. So even in those cases of genres that are not novels, it seems clear that the possible end of literature has not produced that powerful escape from traditional stylistic forms and contents as is the case for figurative art. In this sense, it would be possible to propose an interpretation of these and other literary genres similar to that which will be presented here for the novel. After all, the novel at the time of the end of literature represents one of the best ways in which literature relates to the classic problem of the relationship between tradition and experimental innovation. More than other literary genres, the novel allows us to identify the internal articulation of this relationship.

As already seen above, Danto's analysis of the literary artwork at the time of its end needs further development and this development requires a broadening of references. What I am going to do here is to make explicit and radicalise something that at least in part was already present in Danto, looking elsewhere for a possible further articulation and finding the conceptual apparatus that can help define the working of literature in the author who stands at the origin of this long tradition on the end of art:

Hegel. I will try to go beyond Danto, going back in a certain sense to Hegel and to the complexity of his philosophical proposal on the end of art and literature. The aim is not to bring back Hegel's thought by contrasting it completely with that of Danto. What I will try to do instead is to take up the multifaceted dimensions of Hegel's thought in order to find a possible theoretical development that allows us to understand the peculiar way that literature has to face its end.

The examination of literature in the shape of its end will therefore be conducted through a reworking of some key theoretical gestures of the Hegelian way of understanding the end of art and literature. Hegel's end-of-art thesis helps us explain the twofold nature of the novel's ending. On the one hand, the already mentioned philosophisation of literature, its becoming self-reflective, corresponds to the fact that, in Hegel's system, art is the first form of the absolute spirit, which finds its fulfilment in the subsequent ones, namely religion and, above all, philosophy. On the other hand, the nonfiction novel, moving towards ordinariness, takes up the contextual aspect of Hegel's thesis where art, becoming a thing of the past, no longer dedicates itself to the expression of the great epochal subjects but concentrates on the ordinary situations of everyday life.

The theoretical construction of a model for reading the end of literature through Hegel will then find its application in the analysis of specific literary cases. This will be done by taking into account the kinds of novels that have emerged in recent decades, but that probably only exasperate and make more evident the features that the novel and literature have always had within them. The aim is to identify, within the framework of a model that makes theoretical reference to the end-of-art thesis, some conceptual keys to understanding at least part of contemporary literature and its way of relating to its end.

Two borderline cases, representative of the above-mentioned way literature works in its end, will be identified. On the one hand, it will be found in the postmodern novel and its most recent derivatives; this exemplifies a literature that, undertaking a path of philosophisation operates a process of self-reflection that tries to go beyond the usual idea of literature and tries to cause fractures within the canonical model. On the other hand, the nonfiction novel in its more recent configuration will be taken as a radical example of a literature that in no way intends to create

a break through a reflective process and that, despite this, is perceived as genuinely contemporary in the same way as the more experimental kind. It is not a question of elaborating two rigid categories that outline two impermeable compartments. Obviously, concrete literary production is certainly not reducible to these two extremes. What I will try to show, rather, is how these two borderline cases represent two opposing polarities, between which infinite interconnections are possible. These are two extreme ways in which literature is involved in its end and, between the two opposites, there is an extraordinary variety of intermediate examples that intercept the characteristics partly of one pole and partly of the other. This heterogeneous variety reproduces that pluralism that has always seemed to concern literature, but that does not derive from any epochal turning point, which literature seems to be resisting. Between the two extremes of its end, literature seems to continuously produce and reproduce ways to remain the same.

At the basis of this theoretical discourse and its application lies the conviction that literature, thanks to and because of its linguistic medium, is radically different from the figurative arts and other artistic expression in general. This aspect allows literature to manifest its peculiarity in the way it resists its end, which is also reflected in a specific tradition of the end of literature within the more general tradition of the end of art.

In summary, I will try to support the following theses:

1. Literature does not go towards its end in the same way that other arts do. Thanks to its medium and the use it makes of it, literature has, in itself, elements capable of resisting an irreversible change in its status. At the same time, it goes through the changes involved in the more general history of art, producing a continuous renewal of itself. Literature, among the arts, is the art that resists the most upheavals, because it has in itself, perhaps since time immemorial, the seeds of its end and the capacity to face it, manifesting in this way its own peculiarity.
2. A reworking of Hegel's proposal on the end of art and his way of considering literature can provide conceptual keys that help articulate in a more comprehensive perspective the way literature resists its end. The application of these elements to contemporary literature and especially

to the contemporary novel, drawn and reformulated from Hegelian thought, allows us to see the validity of the discourse on the end of literature also in the interpretation of concrete cases.

This book will therefore follow this division.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to an inquiry into the peculiarity of literature. I identify the differences between literature and the other arts first from an entirely theoretical perspective and then from a historical point of view. The intent behind this chapter is to find in the difference between literature and the other arts the main reason for the different way that literature deals with the question of its end.

Chapter 3 outlines a specific tradition concerning the end of literature in the context of the broader tradition of the end of art. The origins of this tradition will be examined: I begin with the Hegelian proposal and follow by discussing some proposals from Hegel's time that looked in the same direction. It will be shown how the tradition of the end of literature has a close relationship with that of the end of art, but also how there have been theoretical positions on the subject that are almost entirely foreign to the Hegelian legacy, especially with regard to the question of the end of the novel.

Hegel is at the centre of Chapter 4. The end-of-art thesis is discussed in depth within the philosophy that produced it, with particular attention to its specification with respect to the literary artwork. The peculiar, almost paradoxical, character of literature in Hegel's philosophy of art will be underlined. I will address the two typical characteristics of the Hegelian end of art—that of the movement towards philosophy and that of the search for ordinariness—which will then be applied to the reading of contemporary literary production. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Hegel's considerations on the novel.

The last chapter is devoted to interpreting two ways, conceived of as extremes, in which contemporary literature crosses and, in a sense, resists its end. This is the case of the postmodern novel, in its most recent versions, and the case of the nonfiction novel. The aim is not to define two literary genres (or subgenres), but to examine these two attitudes, as the most recent critics and theorists have identified them, in order to place them as opposite extremes of a literary landscape that produces in between an

infinite mixture of the two. In this sense, as will be underlined in the conclusions, the aim is to propose a possible response to the peculiar way in which literature deals with its own end.

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2

Literature and the Other Arts

The basic concern of the present study is the distinctive way literature responds to the end of art. The core thesis is that literature resists its end. Because this claim presupposes a differentiation within the field of art, this chapter focuses on the difference between literature and the other arts. My intention is to describe a difference which, in addition to articulating at least part of the field of art, determines a peculiarity of literature and almost a contrast between it and other artistic expressions. That literature works differently from other art forms in regard to the end of art must be due to the distinct form of literature itself. The analysis of the peculiarity of literature will allow us to set up the conceptual framework for the following investigations into a possible 'end of literature' tradition and to interpret the end of literature through a perspective derived from Hegel's thought.

As will be seen in Chapter 4, literature plays a special role in Hegel's philosophy of art. It occupies both a leading and, at the same time, highly problematic position. On the one hand, literature, which Hegel calls 'poetry', is the model for the other arts. In keeping with the systematic approaches to art at the time, poetry for Hegel stands at the peak of the system and comes at the conclusion of a path of de-materialisation that, from architecture, passes through sculpture, painting and music. On

the other hand, its position at the final stage of the first form of absolute spirit, i.e. art, its placement on the border with the subsequent forms of religion and philosophy, gives it a complex status. The fact that literature, unlike other arts, shares with religion and, above all, with philosophy the medium of the word situates it in an exceptional role compared to other arts. The risk of it turning into something else is much closer. Moreover, especially in modernity, when art loses the political-cultural primacy it had in pre-modern times, literature no longer has that dimension of sacredness it had before. It approaches the ordinary world of everyday life. In this way, literature gets closer and closer to the sphere of everyday language, exposing itself to a further risk of becoming something other than what it is. Both the risk of moving from the artistic to a different, and specifically philosophical, dimension and the risk of being deprived of its artistic constitution in favour of a flattening to ordinariness constitute the two possible perspectives I will identify as the specific modalities that literature has towards its end. These are the two different ways that literature comes close to a definitive mutation, but through which it manages at the same time to remain itself, resisting a radical transformation. The main feature that makes literature a special case within the problem of the end of art is primarily its verbal form, the fact that its medium is the word.

For this reason, before arriving at a deepening of the Hegelian perspective and a proposal about its interpretation, this chapter will address the problem of the difference between literature and the other arts as a general problem. I will try to show how this difference is discussed in the contemporary philosophical-artistic debate and how the current configuration is the product of a determinate historical evolution. On this basis, I will investigate the gap between literature and the other arts from two interconnected perspectives, namely an ontological and a historical one. After a preliminary reflection on the potential and limits of common sense in dealing with a problem like this, the chapter divides into two parts. In the first, I will try to take into account the peculiarity of literature from a point of view that we could define as ontological, that is, from the point of view of what kind of entity it is that we call literature in relation to other entities that we recognise as other art forms. I will try to retrace some of the classic divisions present in the contemporary debate, underlining the peculiarity of literary art. The ontological perspective is a necessary

and absolutely decisive level, because it provides a rational account of the relationship between literature and the other arts. However, it is only one step in reflecting on the work of art and requires integration with a second level, which we can call historical. In this sense, the second part will outline in broad terms the development of this relationship over time in Western history, following a perspective close to that of the *Begriffsgeschichte*, that is, a consideration of the temporal dimension of our commonly used concepts. We will see how the theoretical analysis is the result of a long development over the centuries and how the relationship between literature and other arts has consisted in a continuous succession of approaches and separations. An overall vision of this kind, both theoretical and historical, will allow us to prepare the field for reflection on the peculiar way that literature faces its end.

1 The Common View and Literature

In everyday experience, the identification of what literature as art is seems as obvious as it is complex. When we look for literary artworks, we tend to have some reasonable certainty as to where to find them. For instance, if we go to a bookstore, we know that we can locate literary artworks in the section of classical novels, poetry or new fiction releases; in newspapers and magazines, we find cultural pages or inserts that offer reviews or columns dedicated to literature; on the radio and television, there are sometimes broadcasts specifically devoted to the discussion of literature; we read on web blogs and sites or listen to podcasts about literary topics; moreover and probably first of all, the school curricula provide for a substantial number of hours devoted to the national literatures, and at the university, there are classes that go under the titles of ‘history of modern literature’, ‘comparative literature’ or ‘literary theory’. In general, we have a preliminary understanding of what we mean by the word ‘literature’, which comes mainly from our education, our personal experiences and the institutions that preserve and circulate it. We have a concept that guides us and tells us where to look to find what we mean.

Yet even at this completely naive and unproblematic level, things start to get complicated. The term ‘literature’ (conceived as an art) includes many

different items: we talk about literature when we refer to novels, tales, ancient epics, sacred hymns, epigrams, idylls, dialogues, lyrical poems, plays, etc. It seems sometimes difficult to include in a single category called 'literature' all these cases, which are commonly described as genres (and to which many more other genres could be added).¹ Furthermore, there are literary productions, such as the so-called genre literature (crime stories, thrillers, science fictions, romance novels, children's books, etc.), which only after many years or only thanks to some particularly successful examples have become part of literary common sense. The traditional canon has become unhinged by this development. For it breaks the dichotomy—as present in ordinary classifications as little justified theoretically—between a 'high' literature and a literature denigrated as 'low' or described with a condescending air as 'paraliterature'. Then, there are some intermediate cases that make it problematic to put products in this categorisation: some journalistic reports, some historical works, some autobiographical or travel memories and not to mention artistic phenomena that also include a performative aspect, from theatrical texts to opera librettos. Finally, there are cases of artistic phenomena that previously did not fall within the field of a shared conception of what literature is and that instead are now entering into a common consideration, such as comics or songs, maybe with the seal of some institution or some award of particular relevance. In short, the concept of literature that derives from common sense, insofar as common sense gives us insight into the phenomena, begins to crumble in the face of a multiplicity of cases and under the blows of numerous specifications.

Similarly, if we pose the problem of the differences among the arts and the relationship between literature and the other arts, our common sense seems to give us a quite satisfactory answer. Put in these terms, common sense gives us an answer that is mostly based on the materiality of the phenomena at stake and on the performative aspect of the production and fruition of different artistic phenomena. The difference between an

¹There are various positions that invoke a differentiated treatment of the various literary genres. Among them, Robert Howell, for instance, argues against the possibility of 'a general, comprehensive account that is both informative and philosophically interesting of the type of any (possible) work of literature' (Howell 2002, 67). Anna Christina Ribeiro, on her part, upholds the need to philosophically consider poetry for itself and not as one of the many genres ascribable to the generic notion of literature (Ribeiro 2009).

artwork carved in wood or sculpted in marble and an artwork made up of sounds produced by a musical instrument is intuitively clear. We generally look at a painting or a sculpture, listen to music and read a poem. The different material structure of artistic products involves a different attitude towards them. Trivially, it is quite obvious that in the first instance a novel is not painted, nor is a Greek temple played, nor is a sculpture written.

When the character of William E. Kennick's thought experiment enters the famous warehouse filled with all sorts of different entities ('pictures of every description, musical scores for symphonies and dance and hymns, machines, tools, boats, houses, churches and temples, statues, vases, books of poetry and of prose, furniture and clothing, newspapers, postage stamps, flowers, trees, stones, musical instruments', Kennick 1958, 321), he is asked to separate the mere objects from the work of art and, by doing so, implicitly to find something that unifies the different works of art present in that place. When he does so on the basis of his common sense, the operation seems to be largely successful, but when he adopts a more technical criterion such as Bell's 'having a significant form' or Croce's 'being objects of expressions', the task becomes more complicated (Kennick 1958, 321–322). Kennick's goal in this thought experiment is to undermine the possibility of finding a unique and defining notion of art while also suggesting that, if the request made had simply been to take out of the warehouse all the paintings or statues, the problems would probably have been minor, both from the point of view of its common perception and from that of a possible technical description of the different works. Grouping the different works of art into a single concept seems to be more complicated—and probably is—than saying that a crime novel is different from a Greek temple.

On this basis, most of the time the challenge from a philosophical point of view has been and is to consider 'art' as a whole. The problem is frequently the investigation of norms and conditions, which can be capable of reducing the multiplicity of the art forms to a unified notion. When we talk about 'art', we commonly generalise over a large spectrum of entities that are often very different from each other. When a philosopher looks for a definition of 'art', for instance, she tries to discover the conditions that can explain a notion that includes architecture, dance, painting, music, literature, cinema, performing art, land art, etc. Here the opposite is at

stake: the problem is to figure out the differences among this unity and, in particular, the divide between literature and the other arts. And, although it seems simpler than the problem of unification, it hides complications that are by no means easy to solve.

In the first instance, it is therefore not only a question of a single art form or a regional ontology; the focus here is not only on literature as a particular art, but also on the *relationship* between literature and the rest of the artistic field—what differentiates the former from the latter. In this sense, the question arises at the level of a relationship that is certainly a matter of difference, but which also implies a similarity: what distinguishes phenomena or objects that are in some ways similar? Where to look for the difference between the particular arts within the affinity contest of art? What determines the difference of a single artistic genre within the arts as a whole? Is it possible to identify a unique criterion for dividing the arts? Is it possible to identify intermediate groups between the general concept of art and those of the specific arts? Specifically, what is the difference between the single art of literature and the rest of the other arts, which are different but come together with literature because they are arts?

In this case, common sense provides us with an answer that has many elements of truth in it. However, if we stop at that level, we risk ending up in the most pointless banality, not considering all the elements in the field. Seen more closely, articulating the differences within a general concept like that of art and, above all, finding an agreement that univocally determines the decisive characteristics and conditions for this articulation do not seem to be immediately accessible, because the elements in play are multiple and require different points of view. We can certainly have a general idea, but common sense (and the language that supports it) gives answers whose precision and possible validity for all cases are not always so reliable. If then it is a matter of technically formalising such answers, their value of truth (which is actually present) comes into contact with a series of complications and clarifications that make it possible to demonstrate the insufficiency of this level of discourse.² Even more, with regard to the reflection proposed here, identifying what characterises literature and what gives literature its peculiarity does not seem obvious. For, in addition

²Cf. Thomasson (2004, 79).

to theoretical reasoning on the objects in question, we realise that the concepts we commonly use are not 'neutral'. On the contrary, they are stratifications of value judgements, hierarchical orders and conceptions in general, which have been formed over time, in certain epochs and under specific social conditions, for both literature and art in general.³

For these reasons, in order to orient ourselves in concepts and categories we taken as given, such as those concerning literature, there emerges a need to produce a theoretical discourse that through centuries—and with particular intensity in the twentieth century—becomes institutionalised into a specific branch of knowledge: theory 'comes about when the premises of ordinary discourse on literature are no longer accepted as self-evident, when they are questioned, exposed as historical constructions, as conventions' (Compagnon 1998, 15/6). A theoretical discourse crosses common sense, questions it and tests its effective grip on the object of study. It problematises the concepts in use, questions them from different perspectives, investigates their historical-social sedimentation and tries to reformulate them in order to shed light on what is taken for granted. Through different variations and numerous approaches, it tackles the basic notions of the literary field and its foundations. This is what I will try to do in the next paragraphs by assuming the two significant perspectives (though not the only ones) of ontology and history.

First, a general premise. A reasoning of this kind that begins with an acquired superordinate concept of art presupposes the persistence of the validity of such a concept. Admittedly, especially in an age like ours that we can describe as an age 'after the end of art', that is, especially in an age in which art has undergone countless changes and revolutions by questioning the traditional system of the arts and undermining the very concept of art, one might wonder whether using such a concept does not risk being anachronistic, if not even useless. The distinction between 'emic' and 'etic' levels formulated by Kenneth L. Pike can be useful here. At the 'emic' level, social actors are actually related to the phenomena analysed, while the 'etic' level names the phenomena as represented and studied

³For some interesting considerations on the 'ideological' aspect that innervates the common conception of literature, see Eagleton (2008, 13–14). With regard to the social construction of our value judgements and the categories we use to reason about art, the observations of Bourdieu's classic of the sociology of art remain valid (Bourdieu 1979).

by researchers. Using this distinction to think about the concept of art, one could even go as far as to argue that the use of, and inquiry into, the concept of art have today become *etic*: we study a world that is no longer ours. In the confusion between the two levels, the consideration of 'art' as a concept valid nowadays could be meaningless and the questions about it completely anachronistic.⁴

On the contrary, if we believe that a concept such as the general notion of 'art' can still be valid, at least at an orientational level, and assume that we can maintain it, the difference that interests us presupposes that literature is a specific art form and that this art form is one among many others. It presupposes that one unique category such as 'art' holds together a large number of sub-categories, i.e. the artistic genres. In this extended category, in the category of art in general, all sub-categories have their own specificity and identity and at the same time something in common with the others. This also applies to literature.

On this basis, the problem of the specificity of literature with respect to the other arts is part of the debate on the modes of existence of a literary artwork or, more technically, on what the contemporary discussion calls the ontology of literature. The analysis proposed here begins from this perspective, and, in the following paragraph, some of the most relevant positions of the contemporary debate will be taken into consideration. It must be said, then, that this discussion is related to, but not the same as, that of the definition of literature. Although this last question intertwines with that of what sort of phenomenon or object literature is, the issue to be addressed is more specific and, in some ways, more lateral.⁵ If literature is an art among the arts, that is, if the literary artwork falls within the greatest classification of artistic phenomena, what distinguishes literature

⁴Pike (1967). Conceived in an anthropological context, this methodological distinction has had great success in a considerable number of human sciences. For instance, Carlo Ginzburg has recently applied the distinction between *emic* and *etic* to the relationship between Machiavelli's work and its reception (Ginzburg 2018). I would like to thank Prof. Ginzburg for having suggested this theoretical approach to me.

⁵Thomasson rightly points out that investigating what sort of entity is a work of art is, that is to say posing an ontological problem with respect to it, is different from identifying the conditions that must be satisfied in order to consider something art, distinguishing it from non-art and thus providing a definition of it. The kind of question is different and then the fundamental statues of a work of art can be shared by other non-art objects and not all works of art can have the same statues (Thomasson 2004, 78). See also Lamarque (2009, 67) and Thomasson (2016, 349).

from other arts? What are the specific features that make literature fall within the arts and what are those that, unlike other arts, indicate its peculiarity?

2 Ontological Perspective

2.1 Objects and Artworks

In order to try to give answers and analyse some proposals for a division in the field of art, the starting point is first of all the material character of the artworks. Works of art take place in a certain space and at a certain time, are made of something, and come to light through their material form. They express themselves in a concrete medium and the quality of the medium changes depending on the singular form of art.

By taking this path, in the first instance, we can consider the work of art as an object among others. A statue, a painting and a book are all objects that we recognise to be works of art and that we take into consideration primarily as objects—to put it in the words of Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*: at first, 'we consider the works in their untouched actuality and do not deceive ourselves, the result is that the works are as naturally present as are things' (Heidegger 1977, 3/19). But already at this level, we understand that this is an insufficient comprehension of the work of art and a rather problematic starting point for the ontological inquiry into it (and of course, Heidegger doesn't consider the work of art just a thing, but also and above all a place where the truth is disclosed).⁶

If it is true that arts such as a painting or a bust present themselves as objects, which risk being ruined or broken, which must be preserved and restored, it is equally true that they, as artworks, are not reducible to their material qualities: as works of art, a painting is something more

⁶There may be borderline cases, such as free jazz improvisation, that make the description of those entities as 'works of art' problematic (S. Davies 2003, 156), and certainly it is a description that should not be taken as always valid from a historical-conceptual point of view (Goehr 2007). At this level of discourse, however, given that most artistic entities can be ontologically considered in this way, it is assumed that artistic entities are works of art. Moreover, for reasons of brevity, I will focus mainly on the traditional arts of architecture, sculpture, painting, music and literature.

than the colour arranged on a canvas, and a bust is not reduced to a piece of sculpted marble. For other kinds of art, instead, we realise that the immediate identification with an object is more complicated and perhaps it is more appropriate to pose the problem of their non-objectuality. For arts such as music, theatre, performance art and also literature, it is more difficult to recognise an object that can be identified with the work of art. One can wonder whether a sonata corresponds, as a work of art, to the specific execution that is produced in a given place and time or to the material support on which it is recorded. It is possible to recognise it in the score that reports the determined succession of notes, but, also in this case, the identification of the specific work of art becomes even more complicated. Here, one can think that the work of art is the original score of the composer, but the original score can be missing, and one can make the sonata correspond to the set of scores that show that specific sonata or to the tradition that, starting from the original score, has handed down to the specific execution of that sonata.⁷

In short, we immediately see that the material quality of a work of art takes into account only one aspect of the entity in question and immediately poses the much wider question of what distinguishes it from ordinary objects. Moreover, as far as arts such as music and literature are concerned, their status as non-objects poses questions about where to locate the specific entity that identifies the work of art.⁸

Reasoning about the materiality and objectuality of works of art has produced positions that do not identify the work of art (any work of art) in the object at all, but in what can be called the 'idea' that underlies and constitutes it, positions that are classically attributed to Croce, Collingwood and also Sartre.⁹ More recently, there are several proposals that identify the work of art not in the object nor in the idea, but in the action and performance that comes to produce them (Currie 1989; Wolterstorff 2003;

⁷Cf. Lamarque (2009, 67).

⁸Cf. Lamarque (2010, 3–7). On the relationship between works of art and objects, see also D'Angelo (2011, 144–150). With particular reference to the literary artwork, see Barbero 2013 (pp. 53–60).

⁹For a survey and discussion of these classical positions and the following mentioned, see Thomasson (2004, 80–81).

D. Davies 2004).¹⁰ Nevertheless, the fact that at the basis of the work of art there is a 'physical medium' (Margolis 1980, 41–42) or 'vehicular medium' (D. Davies 2004, 56), which is not completely identical with the work of art, seems still to be a determining element to create subdivisions within the field of art, even in its problematic nature.¹¹ If, on the one hand, the ontological analysis of the work of art cannot be limited to its materiality, on the other hand, the classification of the different art forms as well as those used in the philosophy of art have their basis for the most part precisely in the kind of materiality (or immateriality) they present.

One of the most classical divisions is the one that refers to the spatio-temporal aspect of the arts. According to this classification, arts such as architecture, sculpture and painting are arts of space, in the sense that they present a unity of parts in relations with each other whose coexistence is given in a determined physical location. Music and literature, instead, express themselves as a series of elements that develop in a temporal succession. It is a division that has become classical since Lessing's discussion of the relationship between poetry and painting in his *Laocoön*, where 'succession in time is the sphere of the poet, as space is that of the painter' (Lessing 1990, 130/64–65). Clearly, this is a subdivision that, although valuable, responds only to an initial approach to the artworks. Here, literature is temporal because it has the possibility of representing situations, events or even sensations in a diachronic way. Not that arts such as painting or even sculpture cannot do this, but certainly this possibility is more limited in terms of extension and possible depth. Contrarily, the spatial aspect is actually less predominant, even if the spatial dimension and the visual composition on the page may in some cases have a role that is not so secondary (think of the importance of the arrangement of words

¹⁰ Another position that does not identify the (literary) artwork in a real object, but neither even in an ideal entity is that of the classic Ingarden (1973), which proposes to understand the literary artworks, characters and everything that is represented as 'purely intentional formation' (Cf. Thomasson 2016, 350).

¹¹ Lamarque, for example, has underlined the role of the intentionality of the person who works a material, who conceives it as a medium and turns it from a 'vehicular medium' into an 'artistic medium': 'an artistic medium involves *the conception of a work by its maker as being a work of a certain kind*' (Lamarque 2010, 40). For an in-depth discussion of the concept of medium in art, especially with regard to the possibility of not considering the medium in exclusively instrumental terms and the related debate on the so-called medium purity, see D. Davies (2003).

in lyrics in general or of more specific poetic forms, such as calligrams, where space takes on significance).

Going further, spatial arts immediately identify themselves with physical objects and correspond univocally to the object through which they express themselves, whereas the temporal arts are arts that use an object as a mediation, a vehicle, but are not limited to it and find in their material mediation only a replaceable medium. In the first group, one would gather together arts such as painting, non-cast sculpture and in a certain way architecture, whereas in the second group one would find music, literature, opera, dance, photography (if produced from negatives) and, to a certain extent, cinema.¹² Among the latter, one can further distinguish the arts that presuppose a performance such as dance or opera and those that do not primarily involve such a presentation, like literature (although literature can also be performed in a reading). This kind of articulation can be described, always in very general terms, through the partition between singular and multiple works of art.¹³ Here, literature falls within the category of multiple arts in the sense that a specific literary work can produce a plurality of copies.

This subdivision has been refined, through a more technical language and approach, and consolidated into two now classical ways of dividing works of art within the analytical tradition.

The first one, found in Richard Wollheim's 1968 classic book *Art and Its Objects*, concerns the dichotomy between type and token, applied to works of art (Wollheim 1980, 74–76). In this case, the arts of the first group, such as painting and sculpture, have a type, namely their abstract entity, which corresponds uniquely to the token of which the concrete work of art is made, that is, to its single material realisation. As far as the arts of the second group are concerned, the type corresponds—let us consider the literary case—to the sequence of specific words and sentences with which a certain work of art is written, while tokens are all the instantiations of

¹²Although the architect's drawing can potentially be reproduced several times, the architectural works considered as art are for the most part unique works that are identified with their specific realisation. Although a movie remains exactly the same at each screening, multiple films are physically produced and distributed in multiple copies.

¹³Cf. S. Davies (2003, 156–170).

the type. The instantiations are the multiple books or pages, which report that sequence of words.¹⁴

A second, highly influential distinction, introduced by Nelson Goodman, is between autographic and allographic artworks. This distinction concerns, across the different art forms, the reproducibility of a work of art. Autograph artworks are those for which ‘the distinction between original and forgery of it is significant; or better, if and only if even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine’ (Goodman 1976, 113). In other words, autographic artworks’ reproduction implies the production of something substantially different from the original. The arts that produce this kind of work are painting and sculpture, for which the production of the object constitutes an indistinct unity with the production of the artwork. For the allographic artworks, instead, the distinction between original and forgery is not significant, because they presuppose a syntax that is reproduced later and that is configured as an execution of that syntax. Music and literature belong to these arts that are arts for which the differences between the original and the copy ‘in style and size of script or type, in color of ink, in kind of paper, in number and layout of pages, in condition, etc., do not matter’, but for whom it only matters ‘what may be called *sameness of spelling*: exact correspondence as sequences of letters, spaces, and punctuation marks’ (Goodman 1976, 115).¹⁵

These are just some of the possible ways of subdividing the field of the arts. Other ways of dividing the different arts depart from material constitution. Georg Bertram, for example, adds to the classic cases already listed some classifications that distance themselves from the object-related aspect of the work of art and from the more strictly ontological discourse, referring instead to their formal constitution or how an audience perceives

¹⁴Going in a way beyond the alternative between the possibility of conceiving artworks as abstract or concrete entities, proposals identifying the work of art as actions or performances take up the type/token pair and consider artworks either as types of action that the artist at a certain moment empirically discovers as if she found out a given structure (Currie 1989) or as an individual performance, in terms of a token, produced by an artist (D. Davies 2004).

¹⁵Wolterstorff attenuates the exact correspondence of the sameness of spelling between the original and the copy, considering works of art such as music, literature or drama as norm-kinds. The norm-kind, for instance Beethoven’s Opus 111, can have both properly, but also improperly formed instances and there would still remain that specific work of art, as in the case where, for example, the pianist misses a note of the score. The discussion of Goodman’s position is in Wolterstorff (2003, 98–105).

them. He proposes a distinction drawn and reworked from Nietzsche between the Apollonian arts, i.e. arts that pursue a clear formal regularity (such as figurative painting or classical sculpture), and the Dionysian arts, where formal deconstruction is more marked (among the examples, free jazz and action painting). He also develops, by freely rereading Benjamin's reflections, a distinction between auratic arts, i.e. art forms that induce in the viewer an attitude of distance from the work and of consequent internal contemplation (among these, painting, sculpture and literature), and not auratic, i.e. art forms that produce an external and enthusiastic involvement of the viewer in them (such as cinema or certain cases of music and architecture) (Bertram 2011, 68–77).¹⁶

If we stick to the more classical and ontological approaches, however, what these proposals have in common with regard to their consideration of literature is its character of immateriality (an element that will also return in the Hegelian subdivision of the arts). Nonetheless, the fact that the work of literary art is identified as an art that can hardly be considered thing-like is not enough to determine its peculiarity compared to the others, first of all compared to others with which it shares its immaterial being. The issue of materiality or immateriality, which can be articulated in different ways and considered from different points of view, can only be the first step in an ontological reasoning on the difference between the arts and on the specific difference between literature and the other arts. The problem, at this point, becomes the quality and kind of materiality (or immateriality) that concerns the arts in their differentiation.

2.2 Artworks and Texts

According to the main classifications mentioned above, literature is a temporal art, whose type produces many tokens, therefore multiple and allo-graphic. These are all technical classifications that distinguish literature from arts such as sculpture, architecture, and painting—from those arts

¹⁶On the criteria of division of the arts and traditional classifications, see also D'Angelo (2011, 167–177).

that, roughly speaking, are more directly identified with objects. Compared to these, literature presents itself as a more immaterial art. Nonetheless, the immateriality of literature is a particular kind of immateriality.

Both literature and music, for instance, are immaterial, but in different ways. The symbolic system that constitutes them and with which these arts are transmitted is not the same. Moreover, the material process with which they are executed and transmitted is radically different. There is no doubt that there may be common territories and intersections between the two arts (think, e.g., of the musicality of literary works), but the ontological distance between the two is noticeable. As far as literature is concerned—and here we return to the common-sense level—literature is characterised by the fact of being an art made up of words, that is, of being constituted and of expressing itself through a verbal language organised in text.¹⁷

This is a rather obvious point, but decisive for the ontological configuration of this art and pregnant with consequences. If, on the one hand, the textual work of art loses the perceivable three-dimensionality and consistency of the more material arts, it gains the possibility of developing an infinite number of situations, events and sensations that are more difficult for the material arts to reproduce. It is also able to describe in an extensive and in-depth way the content of what it represents. Furthermore, uniquely among the arts, it even has the ability, in addition to being merely didactic with respect to its content, to explain it, to reason on it and to reflect on its content, form and what it is. It can do all this through a particular use of ordinary language. From out this use of language, it produces a specific pattern that gives rise to an imaginative dimension, one that becomes the specific language of art itself.

What characterises the literary work of art seems therefore to be its expression through the word organised in sentences that lead to the composition of a text (both written and orally expressed). As for the identification of the literary work of art with the text, the debate has led to two different positions, not necessarily conflicting and, in some way, reconcilable. On the one hand, there is the textualist position of those who

¹⁷This does not mean that in other arts it is not possible to find portions of text—think, for example, of certain of Roy Lichtenstein's paintings that reproduce comic strips that contain entire sentences or captions, more or less extensive, of films—but in those cases, the text does not ontologically determine the work of art and does not identify it for what it is, as it happens instead for literature.

identify the work of literary art in its text-type of which the material realisations—copies of pages and books or the appearance on the screen of e-books—are text-tokens. On the other hand, there is the so-called contextualist position, that is, the position of those who do not identify the literary artwork in mere text, but who consider the historical origin and the socio-cultural practices of the period in which the text was produced as an integral part of this identification. According to this perspective, a text-type needs to be embedded in its social and historical context in order to be understood in its ontological identity. This is the view, thanks to which the works of Cervantes and Menard in Borges' story, mentioned above in the discussion of Danto, can be considered two different artworks. They are conceived and received at different times and in different contexts.¹⁸ This position recalls and in part refers to the institutional theories of art, i.e. theories that argue against an essentialist identification of works of art as valid in every historical period, seeing instead how specific contextual factors like cultural beliefs and institutions are necessary for identifying a work of art.¹⁹ Clearly, in this case too, various problems arise, starting from the degree of depth that contextual analysis must have (is a general historical knowledge sufficient or is it necessary to go as far as knowing the life and biographical habits of the author?) to the need for a work to have an author (does the question of whether the *Iliad* has one or more author modify the ontology of the work?).²⁰

¹⁸Here, of course, I mean the couple 'work' and 'text' in a less extensive and fundamental sense than the famous distinction made by Roland Barthes, for whom the work is something material that can be identified (it is placed in a library, it is identified with a substance), while the Text (with capital letter) is a methodological field of which the potential of writing and its relationship with other texts are explored, before they are fixed in institutional interpretations (Barthes 1984b). In a very interesting way, Lamarque critically discusses Barthes' position and underlines how, unlike his distinction between 'work' and 'Text', for the contextual position not only the text, but also the work is an abstract entity, a type that can have infinite concrete tokens. Prioritising the text over the work means placing oneself on a conception opposite to the contextualist one (Lamarque 2009, 81). For a recent criticism of Lamarque's reading of Barthes, see Stocker (2018, 6–8).

¹⁹For an overview of institutional theories in the philosophy of literature, see Lamarque (2009, 57–66).

²⁰For a detailed discussion of the relationship between textualism and contextualism and the limits of the two positions, see also D. Davies (2007, 19–31) and Lamarque (2009, 71–81). The second problem, that of the need to have an author, opens the discourse to the much more complex and articulated topic of the death of the author, as proposed by Barthes (1977) and Foucault (1994),

Beyond contextualist integration, however, in determining the peculiarity of the literary work of art compared to other art forms, the textual dimension remains central. A work is literature because it consists of a text. Though it can be transmitted through different media and be identified in different ways depending on the era, it nevertheless remains a text. At this point, the question arises as to whether the textual constraint is sufficient to identify a work of literary art. It is probably a sufficient element to distinguish it from other forms of art, but it does not seem enough to identify literature as such. A problem of this kind goes beyond the fundamental question that interests us here. However, it may be useful to make a few further points in this respect.

2.3 Texts and Literature

The textual dimension is one of the fundamental features for the identification of literature, but certainly not all texts fall within the scope of literature. The fact of being a text is a necessary but not sufficient condition for literature: without doubt, a novel or lyric is difficult to think of without the textual dimension that characterises them. Nevertheless, it is with as much difficulty that we could bring within the scope of literature texts such as the email we sent a week ago to confirm an appointment, the package insert of the syrup we had to take to stop our flu or the timetable of the train that we consulted to go to work. Of course, this does not prevent these non-literary texts from ending up in literary texts; there is a specific tradition of epistolary novels and scenes of everyday life such as those described above included in a novel, in a drama or even in a poem. But still, in the first instance these kinds of texts are not part of what we call literature.

Moreover, it is even more complicated to distinguish between a concept of literature in the broad sense and a concept of literature as art, which seems to be narrower. The notion of literature in the broad sense contains a very large number of texts: for instance, we speak of historical, philosophical, legal, economic literature and so on. Within the texts that can

according to which the figure of the author is a modern construction and becomes superfluous in the interpretation and evaluation of a work (Cf. Lamarque 2009, 104–115).

be included in the concept of literature in the broad sense, there are many texts that we would not bring under the concept of literature as art. It is not that these texts cannot have a marked literary quality, but rather that this quality is not their main characteristic.

At this point in our reasoning, we are going beyond the problem of the relationship and difference between literature and the other arts. We are moving from the ontological problem to the problem of defining literature and therefore to the distinction between texts that are literature in the sense of art and texts that are not. If we do not stop at an exclusively institutionalist perspective, that is, at a view that identifies literature as art with what the socio-cultural context indicates as such, literature is that particular art that uses the word (and therefore the textual dimension) in the artistic sense as the main element of its identity. Using the word artistically, literature produces ‘an unusual kind of attention [...] which would be not appropriate for reading different kinds of texts, scientific or philosophical’ (Lamarque 2010, 77). However helpful, this description still begs for a more specific determination of what is involved in the artistic use of the word. For this reason, going partially beyond the intent of the chapter, but taking into consideration elements that may be useful in the continuation of the discourse, I will just limit myself to making some hypotheses and briefly dealing with some problems of this artistic use.

The investigation of literary quality or literacy has been one of the central topics of the contemporary theory of literature and the philosophy of literature since the investigations of the Russian Formalists. It is the search for that element that determines literature as such. In the well-known sentence of Roman Jakobson, the ‘object of literary science is not literature but literariness, that is, what makes a given work a literary work’ (Jakobson 1977, 16).²¹

First, it can be assumed that the artistic use of words in literature requires greater attention to choice and composition. We can name and describe this attention in several ways: it is an attention to ‘fine writing’, to form (if the distinction between form and content makes sense), maybe to style.

²¹Admittedly, it should be pointed out that for Jakobson and the formalists the literariness is not so much an essential property as an ‘organising principle’; understood in this way, it could also be read as posing itself beyond the ‘what is literature’ question (Bottiroli 2006, 47–48).

It is a kind of attention, that is, which is made up of the selection of words, the use of metres, rhetorical figures, figurative language, attention to the sound and rhythm of the words. It can be an attention to the estrangement of ordinary language into something artistic, as the Russian Formalists intended, or a metaphorical use of the language as a whole, to recall Danto's words. It can be a way of using language that conveys aesthetic qualities and is able to stimulate the imagination and a certain kind of pleasure in the reader. This can certainly be an important element which is more evident in some literary genres, such as lyrics, but perhaps it is not a sufficient condition to determine a literary work of art as such: many texts that we do not include in the category of literary artworks make use of a great style, of deep attention to form and of a 'finely written' language.

Another hypothesis that can be made is that, unlike other kinds of text, texts we include in the concept of literature as art tell a story. This perspective brings the concept of literature as art closer to that of narrative, that is, to a concept in which literary texts tell an event that has a beginning and an end and in which there are different situations that make up the succession of this event. This is certainly the case with most novels or ancestors of this genre, like epic narratives, in which a story is usually told that has, as its limits, the beginning and end of the narration. In other cases, such as that of lyrics, to give the most obvious example, the discourse becomes more complex: often in a lyric no story is told, but a state of mind is manifested or a feeling is expressed that is completely isolated from a narrative contextualisation and which can only potentially be reconstructed later, perhaps knowing the biography of the poet. Also in this case, the narration of a situation or a series of situations can certainly be proper to other kinds of text, for example historical ones, and it does not seem to be an exclusive quality of literature.

One last hypothesis is that of fiction. A work of literary art is a work whose content is fictional, a work that comes from the imagination of the writer or that is filtered through her imagination. This is partly true, even for the most cruelly realistic novel, in the sense that the point of view and the way in which the author looks at the object or event described pass through a personal imaginative elaboration in any case. It is equally true, however, that there are examples of realism—we will see with the

case of the nonfiction novel in the last chapter—that put a strain on the imaginative intention, making the fictional characteristic less binding in the determination of literature as art. Finally, the fact that some minimal imaginative activity on the part of the author (though not necessarily fictional) can be attributed to any text means that representations of fictional situations may be present in other kinds of text, for instance in the thought experiments we find in philosophy.

Identifying the specific quality of a literary text compared to others is not at all easy. The answers that have been given, which have given rise to endless discussions and to which the debate has added many other possibilities, do not seem unequivocal and definitive. The artistic quality of a text probably contains pieces of truth from most of these answers, but in this sense, the problem goes beyond what is relevant for us here about the difference between literature and other arts and turns into what is and is not art (and into the problem, perhaps even more radical, whether a categorisation like that of ‘art’ is valid or is still valid today). Moreover, there is no doubt that the contextual and historical dimension, or the fact that today we can consider a work of literary art something that in past centuries was not (and vice versa), plays an important role.

To come back to the problem of the relationship between literature and the other arts, it is precisely this dimension that I intend to investigate now. The aim is to show how the relationship described so far is only a part of the problem and that it, as it presents itself to our ontological consideration, is only a construction and the current result of a path traversing many centuries.

3 Historical Perspective

The purely ontological and philosophical analysis, which produces a technical background of concepts and refined strategies of understanding, is undoubtedly fundamental to setting out a discussion on the division between literature and the other arts. However, limiting oneself to this kind of approach poses at least two problems. On the one hand, one runs the risk of proposing a discussion that is too general and abstract; it sometimes seems to bring up problems that are excessively technical or too

far removed from our common perception of things. On the other hand, there is the possibility—probably even more troublesome—of hypostatizing the concepts that are employed, taking it for granted that they have always been the same in every age.

The second part of this chapter intends precisely to give historical concreteness to the relationship between literature and the other arts. It is based on the conviction that a proposal of this kind can and must go hand in hand with the ontological approach to the problem in considering such a complex matter as the difference among the arts. It is not so much a question of embracing a conception that would be described as contextualist or institutional, although it may share common traits with a perspective of this kind; it is not a question of taking into consideration a specific artwork and linking it in a profound way with the period in which it comes to light, attributing to it the traits proper to the context that produced it. The historical dimension to be investigated is more general. It concerns the very categories that are used in philosophical-literary argumentation. In other words, the issue here is not to underline the dependence of an artwork on its context, but to account for the historical circumstances that categories such as ‘literature’ and ‘arts’ bring with them. That is to say, the concepts we use for our theoretical reasoning are nothing more than the product of a long and troubled evolution. In this regard, referring mainly to a tradition like that of the *Begriffsgeschichte*, what I will try to do here is a conceptual-historical analysis of the relationship between literature and other arts, showing that it is not at all a fact that belongs to things once and for all, but rather is the result of a centuries-old process that has had different dynamics.²²

One of the contemporary philosophers who has most deeply investigated and focused on the need to consider the different artistic forms in their specificity is Peter Kivy. He points out that our ordinary and theoretical conception of art as a unitary whole is quite recent and has specific historical roots that go back to the eighteenth century. Relying on the

²²With *Begriffsgeschichte*, I obviously refer to the methodological approach of Joachim Ritter, Otto Brunner, Reinhart Koselleck and Erich Rothacker, the original points of reference out of which a consistent series of developments have occurred over the years and in different fields, not least in the philosophy of art. For a detailed overview of this type of perspective, see Müller and Schmieder (2017).

studies of Paul O. Kristeller (1951, 1952), who identifies in the 1746 work of Charles Batteux, *Les Beaux arts réduits à un même principe*, the institutionalisation of an art system, Kivy underlines how this historical passage of shaping art into a system—a system that usually sees within it the arts of architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry²³—has been decisive for our mental image of what we usually consider art and also for the very constitution of the reflection on art as a discipline.²⁴ This does not mean, certainly, that there had not previously been a reflection on the single arts or on the ensemble of certain artistic forms. Nevertheless, the consolidation of concepts such as art as an organic whole as we know and use it today, with an articulation that determines the various artistic forms as specific parts of a single large category called ‘art’, emerges in Western culture at a specific time, i.e. when different artistic forms are conceived within a unitary system. Kivy writes:

Without the modern system there could not be *the* philosophy of art – only philosophizing about things that were later to be seen as of a piece. Before they were seen as of a piece, however, there was nothing for *the* philosophy of art to be about, that is to say, *the* philosophy of all *the* arts.

I am not, of course, saying that the arts of music, painting, literature and the rest did not exist before the eighteenth century. What did not exist was the belief that they formed a separate class: that they belonged with each other. And it was that belief that made the discipline of aesthetics possible: that gave it its subject matter, *the* arts, all of them, and the task of saying why they were *they*. (Kivy 1997, 3–4)

Partly moderating Kristeller’s view, Kivy rightly underlines how Batteux’s work is the product of a rich and multiple context made up of cultural phenomena that led to the rise of that specific view on art.²⁵ Furthermore, there were theoretical interventions that had already prepared the field and made progress towards the establishment of reflection on

²³This was the most widespread quintet and has since been consolidated. Sometimes the arts varied and dance or gardening was added. In Batteux’s system, for example, dance replaced architecture.

²⁴Cf. Shiner (2001, 79–94).

²⁵Among other elements, Kivy suggests the appearance of institutions aimed at the conservation and diffusion of art such as fine art museums, concert halls and the establishment of the public concert or the rise of instrumental music placed on the same level as vocal music (Kivy 1997, 2).

art as a discipline, such as the works of authors like Addison, Hutcheson, DuBos and of course Baumgarten, who in 1753 had already published his *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema parinentibus* and who, between 1750 and 1758, got his *Aesthetica* into print, which would give the name to the discipline. In general, what is fundamental to the discourse undertaken here about the difference between the individual arts is their articulation in a system.²⁶ It can be added that, as this articulation in a system emerges in the eighteenth century and especially with the reflections of the French Enlightenment, it takes on a decisive theoretical deepening in the aesthetics at the turn of the nineteenth century in Germany. In the art-philosophical thoughts of authors such as the Schlegel brothers, Schelling, Solger and Hegel (and in the previous discussions on the arts and their relationships in authors such as Schiller and Goethe), art conceived as a system of individual arts will have a central place, and the reflection on this kind of organisation of the arts will have a decisive force. This has produced a passage, which has been read as a real transition from a system of the arts as a simple empirical classification to a system of the arts of a speculative kind, where the articulations within art and the individual parts of the system assume a real philosophical dimension.²⁷

In general, what Kivy tells us is that our standard views on art—even beyond its specific determination or technical study—are the product of both a theoretical elaboration and a well-defined historical context that are not at all abstract. An appropriate discussion of the individual arts and the relationship between them (or some of them) cannot avoid taking into account the historical perspective as a decisive aspect that integrates an exclusively ontological point of view on the matter. The concepts of art and literature—concepts that only from a purely ontological and contemporary point of view imply, as we have seen, extreme theoretical difficulties—have not always been employed as we use them today and have not always meant the same things. Besides, their relationship has changed over time.

²⁶Kivy (1997, 4–5).

²⁷The distinction between normative-empirical and speculative-deductive systems belongs to Peter Szondi. He uses it to explain the change of perspective in the conception of the literary genres of the German authors just mentioned compared to those of the past (Szondi 1974c). In general terms, the same applies not only to the systems of literary genres, but also to the systems of the arts.

The importance of history in the philosophical consideration of works of art has been widely discussed by Lydia Goehr in her *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* where she questions the normative and not at all neutral and eternal dimension of the concept of musical work as a 'work'. She conducts her analysis by shifting the attention 'from asking what kind of *object* a musical work is, to asking what kind of *concept* the work-concept is' (Goehr 2007, 90). Referring among others to Friedrich Waismann's theory of open concepts, Goehr manages to put the ontological aspect of a mainly analytical matrix in dialogue with the historical awareness of the mutability of concepts, obtaining a theoretical approach for which 'a methodological priority is given to making ontological claims compatible with the historical and conceptual complexity of the subject-matter with which they are associated' (Goehr 2007, 89).²⁸ It is a question of adopting a similar perspective for the following. In addition to the ontological perspective, therefore, it is also necessary to deepen—albeit in broad terms—the historical point of view. To this end, it is useful to consider the perspective that could be defined as historical-conceptual, i.e. to see how the relationship between literature and other arts has had a not at all linear evolution and how it has gone through several phases. Although the aims, themes and extent of the discourse are different from those of Goehr's book, a general methodological approach of this kind is fruitful for realising that the categories and approaches used above are not neutral and have not always been valid throughout history.

An art historian and theorist such as Władysław Tatarkiewicz has thoroughly considered the constitution of the concept of art and its articulation into a system. In his *History of Aesthetics* and more specifically in his *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics*, he examines in particular the relationship between literature and the other arts as a story of continuous divisions and approaches. In what follows, I will trace in general terms and discuss his reconstruction. Among the many possible perspectives, I take as a point of reference a classic like Tatarkiewicz because his reflections on the history of Western art are in some respects still unsurpassed in their extension and comprehensiveness. Even though such a broad reflection

²⁸For a discussion of Goehr's position and the need to combine ontological analysis with the historical dimension, see Giombini (2017, 206–212).

can leave room for inevitable objections and the possibility of indicating other examples that can further articulate the path that will be traced, what is interesting to emphasise is the entirely historical nature of the conception concerning the contemporary relationship between literature and art.

3.1 The Ancient Divide

In the ancient world, the way of conceiving art and poetry (the concept of literature is much more recent) was completely different from that of modernity. Though the ancient Greek and Latin worlds had a concept, τέχνη or *ars*, which included most what is now called fine arts, it was partly different and also much broader than our notion of ‘art’. Those that will later be considered ‘fine arts’ did not make a group of their own and the concept of τέχνη/*ars* corresponded rather to a more general ability to make a material object according to the knowledge of certain rules.

If we look at the well-known categorisation of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, which comes later in the Greek era but which is exemplary of the ancient world, τέχνη is one of the five dianoetic virtues, namely those that refer to discursive or cognitive reason as opposed to ethical ones, along with ἐπιστήμη, φρόνησις, σοφία and νοῦς (Aristotle 1962, 1139a/327). Among them, φρόνησις (practical wisdom) and τέχνη deal with what can change and differ, for instance, from the ἐπιστήμη (knowledge), which turns to the immutable and necessary principles and which, combined with the truths drawn from the concrete experience of the νοῦς (intellect), produces σοφία (wisdom). Although they both belong to the practical sphere, if the φρόνησις is expressed in action (πρᾶξις) and has value for itself, τέχνη is enacted in the production (ποίησις) of an object that distinguishes itself from the action that produces it (Aristotle 1962, 1140a/335). Whoever possessed and exercised a τέχνη was a δημιουργός, that is, a sort of worker for the common good or for the community (δῆμος), and to this category were equated a remarkable variety of functions. In fact, the notion of τέχνη included some of our fine arts, but also and above all what we might call crafts, such as the activity of the carpenter or weaver.

Tatarkiewicz notes that what varies more within the ancient Greek conception of art compared to the modern one is the degree of generalisation about the concept of art and the categories used to conceive it. For this reason, an extremely extended concept such as τέχνη, which included highly different fields of production, was counterbalanced by very specific concepts of artistic genres. In the *Poetics*, for example, Aristotle lists the group of the imitative arts and there we find epics, tragic poetry, comedy, dithyrambs and most music for aulos and lyre (Aristotle 1995, 1447a/29). There is no conceptual level which we could define as intermediate and which would correspond to the concept of poetry or, even, of literature in a broader sense: if, as Tatarkiewicz writes, ‘we compare this system of ideas on art with ours, it can be stated that the Greeks possessed the apex and base of the pyramid of artistic concepts; the apex was the concept of art, while the base was represented by a number of very special and narrow concepts. The Greeks did not, however, possess the intermediate planes with which modern thought most willingly operates’ (Tatarkiewicz 1980, 77–78).

Moreover, the very conceptual articulation of the arts and the underlying subdivision of artistic labour were different. Some of the arts that are now considered separately were then closely related. Architecture, sculpture and painting were closely linked as material arts that produced objects that were to be seen. Poetry, on the contrary, which for a long time, was mainly produced in oral form, was markedly distinct from these arts and was conceived in an almost indissoluble way together with music and dance, which accompanied its execution, forming therefore a concept of a specific art that was substantially unitary.²⁹ One reason for the different subdivision within the field of the arts lies in the fact that Greek people looked at art from the point of view of the artist, of those who produced it, and not of those who looked or listened to it, with particular attention therefore to the materials and means of the production of the arts.³⁰

Hence the different position figurative artists and poets occupied within the society. If the former were considered craftsmen, executors of a totally

²⁹Cf. Tatarkiewicz (1970a, 20–25).

³⁰Cf. For an overview of the concept and practice of music in ancient Greece, see Landels (2000, 1–162).

human and manual activity who got paid for their labour, the latter were guests of the aristocratic protector³¹ and similar to figures who mediate with the divine; the poets were therefore the spokespersons of the divine, that is, of the Muses.³² As stated in Aristotle's *Politics*, the former are βάνανσοι and carry out activities that are not worthy of free persons, while the latter carry out an activity that tends towards virtue.³³ For this reason, the figure of the poet, modelled on the mythical example of Homer, was considered a sort of prophet or seer. Although even for the Greeks the activity of the artist-artisan was based on precise rules acquired from experience and learning (and therefore implied theoretical elements and was the result of skills that were not only material), the task of the poet was considered to be of a higher degree. Poetry had a psychagogic function—able to fascinate and enchant minds, it therefore stood close to and in competition with philosophy—as well as moral and educational functions.³⁴

Tatarkiewicz argues that already in classical Greece and, for example, for a philosopher like Plato, there are two ways of conceiving poetry. The first refers to poetry, as just described, as a semi-divine activity produced by prophetic inspiration. The second focuses on the production of verses and on the intention, through verses, to mimetically reproduce reality—and this is the conception of poetry that is found in book X of the *Republic*. In the *Phaedrus*, for example, Plato differentiates between those who are kidnapped by a kind of madness coming from the Muses and, who through this, can compose poetry and educate future generations from those who, instead, deceive themselves and, not being touched by the Muses, delude themselves into thinking they can compose poetry only because they have

³¹ See also Hauser (1953a, 118–125/54–57).

³² For the privileged relationship with the Muses, the activity of the cultured man was generally indicated as μουσική, whereas the distribution, including terminological, of the single arts would have happened with time. Cf. Tatarkiewicz (1970a, 27).

³³ The description of the banausic arts, i.e. manual arts, carried out for remuneration and not suitable for free men, will be very successful and will remain in the characterisation of the *artes serviles*. The demarcation does not concern only the manual aspect, but precisely the reason and the purpose for which a certain activity is performed. For example, even those who study the flute to participate in the agons, aiming at the pleasure of the listeners and not at virtue, do not carry out an activity worthy of a free man (Aristotle 1959, 1341b/667).

³⁴ Cf. Tatarkiewicz (1980, 103).

acquired a certain skill.³⁵ This ambiguity or different vision of poetry is based on the assumption that the products of poetry are not identical and that there is a higher and more inspired poetry, the former, and a poetry of an artisan kind, the latter. While articulating it, therefore, this different conception of poetry only confirms the gap in ancient Greece between poetry and the arts: in the first case, poetry is a form of prophecy, considered as superior to and distinguished from other arts not as an art but because it is inspired by the divine; in the second case, instead, we speak of an artisan activity of lower value and which falls, in Plato, under the criticism of the mimetic arts.

3.2 First Approaches

In late antiquity, the condition of the figurative artist begins to change. At the same time as the prominence of figures such as Alexander the Great and later the growth in importance of the courts of the Diadochi, figurative artists are increasingly recognised as individuals—think of painters such as Apelles, Parrhasius or Zeuxis—which heightens their prestige and richness. They start to free themselves more and more from the field of manual workers and craftsmen, creating a circle of their own. In this context, the division between poetry and the manual arts also undergoes a modification, and the clarity of the division between the two fields begins to diminish.³⁶

Tatarkiewicz identifies in late antiquity at least two clear moments of the approach to and inclusion of poetry within the general category of art.

The first approach is operative in Aristotle's *Poetics*. In this work, Aristotle makes a sort of choice between the two concepts of poetry that were admittedly present in Plato, opting decisively for poetry as an imitative skilled activity and rejecting the one that placed poetry near prophecy. In this way, poetry, together with the arts that were included in its concept, i.e. music and dance, belonged to the group of mimetic arts in the same way as the figurative arts. This grouping of the arts functioned because poetry was conceived as a productive activity carried out according to norms and

³⁵Cf. Plato (2002, 452a).

³⁶Cf. Hauser (1953a, 108–109/48–49).

through a concept that stood as a common denominator, namely that of mimesis. One can read, for example, in the *Poetics* that ‘the poet, like a painter or any other image-maker, is a mimetic artist’ (Aristotle 1995, 1460b/125), losing in a certain sense that privilege that the prophetic interpretation of her role conferred on her: ‘it was not visual art which was raised to the level of poetry, but poetry was depressed to that of the visual arts’ (Tatarkiewicz 1980, 102).

A second approach to the relationship between poetry and the other arts took place in the authors of the Hellenistic period, late antiquity and in the Latin world, but followed an inverse path compared to Aristotle. If the first approach had as a premise Plato’s distinction between mimetic poetry and divinatory poetry and the estrangement of poetry from this second way of conceiving it, this second approach operated exactly by excluding the mimetic aspect as the centre of artistic activity and including the figurative arts within the field of divination (Tatarkiewicz 1980, 105). In the authors of the period—such as Dio Chrysostom, Quintilian, Pausania, Lucian, Philostratus, Callistratus and Plotinus—sculptors and painters are attributed qualities such as wisdom and inspiration, which were typical features of philosophers and, therefore, until then comparable only to the figure of the poet in the most prophetic version. This second approach transforms the very concept of art: art became something spiritual, no longer mechanical and craftsmanlike.³⁷ It became the result of individual creativity and was considered to be inspired by the divine dimension: ‘[p]oetry and visual art were now treated on an equal footing, and they converged not on the lower level of technique (as in Aristotle) but at the higher one of creativity’ (Tatarkiewicz 1980, 108). This sort of increase in the artistic, cultural and social value of the figurative arts thus produced a second approach that—Tatarkiewicz rightly notes—was not generalised, as in the case of Cicero, who remained faithful to the traditional view according to which the arts were the result of a handicraft activity and poetry of a spiritual and divine experience (Tatarkiewicz 1980, 106).

In any case, the field of tension that concerns the relationship between poetry and the other arts begins to undergo significant changes; there are

³⁷Cf. Tatarkiewicz (1980, 107).

approaches between them, stronger and stronger connections. However, the situation is still far from being stable and peaceful.

3.3 The Renewed Divide

With medieval thought and the advent of Christianity, we come back to a perspective closer to that of the traditional ancient Greek conception, abandoning that of the Hellenistic one. That is to say, we find a conception that implies a renewed separation. Christian sensibility opted for a general view of the world that was more spiritual and the theoretical and ontological consideration of art was lowered. Art cannot compete with God's creation; it can help and sustain the processes of nature, but it is lesser than nature.³⁸ In this context, the concept of art regained its ancient extension, which included craft activities.

This does not mean that late antiquity's perspectives did not survive in the more Neoplatonic strands of medieval thought, for instance through the writings of the Pseudo-Aeropagita. However, the role of art was overshadowed and subordinated to the transmission of religious instances and became a secondary field compared to nature created by God: '[a]rt had again become unindividualistic, governed by guild rules and canonical; it followed tradition and rules, not originality' (Tatarkiewicz 1980, 112).

In this sense, a subdivision emerged that followed the ancient model, present in book eight of Aristotle's *Politics* and which had a remarkable fortune even after in the Latin world. It is found in authors such as Hugh of Saint Victor or Rodulfus Ardens. It is the division into *artes liberales* and *artes serviles*, which in the medieval age became *artes mechanicae*.³⁹ The first were those that constituted the sphere of activities taught in schools, which were divided in the typical medieval classification into *trivium*, i.e. grammar, rhetoric and dialectics, and *quadrivium*, i.e. arithmetics, geometry and astronomy. Music was included in this second group, which was part of the liberal arts because the notes were conceived according to the theory of harmony, which was intellectual; instrumental expression was only an external and secondary issue. Within the *artes mechanicae*,

³⁸Cf. Eco (2009, 136–138).

³⁹Cf. Eco (2009, 138–140).

instead, were included the arts that had to do mainly with trade and craftsmanship as well as the arts responsible for the survival of people, such as the *ars victuaria* (the art of feeding people), the *ars lanificaria* (the art that handles clothing), the *ars medicinaria* (the art that cures diseases) and the *ars militaria* (the art of defence from the enemy). As for what we consider to be arts, architecture appears in the lists of *ars mechanicae*, while painting and sculpture usually do not appear (the lists included only the arts considered to be the main ones), but are sure to be ascribed to this second group, as material activities that produce objects according to norms. There is therefore a sort of fragmentation of the field of what the modern arts are considered to be, in a distribution similar to that of ancient Greece, although then the evaluations of the individual arts could also diverge.⁴⁰

As far as poetry is concerned, although the *trivium* contemplated the arts of speech, it was not considered an art, but was conceived as a spiritual activity comparable to philosophy and prophecy, as had already happened in the ancient age and, sometimes, in competition with prayer and confession. In any case, it was clearly distinguished from the list of those that the moderns considered the other fine arts, renewing the division between the two dimensions.⁴¹

3.4 The Definitive Approach?

With the Renaissance, there was a new shift in the conception of art and therefore in its relationship with poetry. The approach towards art departed from the moral and religious dimension and a rapprochement with beauty produced a more properly aesthetic attitude and the consideration of art in itself without further meaning. During this period, there was a new progressive emancipation of the figurative arts from manual work. The figurative artists, coming from the craft guilds, generation after generation, organised themselves in shops where they increased their social prestige and

⁴⁰Cf. Tatarkiewicz (1980, 56–57).

⁴¹Cf. Tatarkiewicz (1970b, 66–76 and 285–293).

trained new artists.⁴² Moreover, the cultural development of Humanism brings them closer and closer to poets.⁴³

Tatarkiewicz identifies two guidelines for this new concept. The first, Neoplatonic and a direct descendant of the Hellenistic conception of art, was represented by intellectual figures such as Marsilio Ficino or Michelangelo Buonarroti. For these authors, the individuality of the artist, free creativity, imagination and inspiration became (or returned to being) central. Art was once again conceived under its sensitive aspect and was considered beautiful in itself, beyond technical and cognitive aspects. Once again, arts such as painting and sculpture were elevated and considered bearers of the same high and positive qualities as poetry. Poetry and the other arts consequently settled again on the same level, and both were highly regarded.

A second line, on the contrary, did not explicitly refer to any ancient precedent and exemplifies the more properly modern line. In this perspective, represented by the positions of Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci, the arts that were previously considered mechanical were not immediately elevated to the status of poetry. They settled at an intermediate level, the rank of the liberal arts, and the artist, no longer a mere craftsman, was compared not to a seer, but to the figure of the scientist.

In general, Renaissance art and poetry merge into a single concept at a stage no longer divine or mystical, but purely sensitive and human: the visual arts were no longer considered directly closer to the mechanical arts, but were placed at a higher level, whereas poetry was lowered to the level of the visual arts.⁴⁴ Therefore, if the Renaissance conceptions, on the one hand, grouped what for the modern time would be the fine arts into the same, unique category, on the other hand, they were not yet separated from the more intellectual and scientific activities. It will be necessary to wait until the eighteenth century for this separation to take place.

⁴²Cf. Hauser (1953b, 331–363/46–75).

⁴³Cf. Ullrich (2002, 573–575).

⁴⁴Tatarkiewicz points out that even this new configuration of the arts has not been univocal or without variants. For instance, if Leonardo could not conceive of the lowering of painting to mechanical art and even raised it above poetry, as far as sculpture is concerned he still adopted the old conceptual scheme, relegating it to the mechanical arts (Tatarkiewicz 1980, 114; cf. also Tatarkiewicz 1974, 126–136).

Mannerism and Baroque made the rapprochement of arts such as painting and poetry more solid and the Orazian saying of *ut pictura poësis*—which as Tatarkiewicz rightly notes originally indicated just a generic analogy between the two artistic forms—became the watchword for an increasingly close and mutually conceived bond.⁴⁵

This progressive and general rapprochement among the arts leads to the grouping of the individual arts under the systematic macro-category of art in general, which was mentioned at the beginning and which has in Batteux, if not its initiator, one of its first most decisive representatives. Starting from the grouping of the individual arts into a system, the concept of art as we know it today began to consolidate and, with it, also that relationship between literature and art that tends to unite literature and other arts within a common field.⁴⁶

However, shortly afterwards, two authoritative voices such as Lessing in *Laocoon* (1766) and Diderot in the *Salons* (1767) discussed the diversity between the arts, in particular between literature and painting, and the impossibility of uniting them or making them models for one another. Nevertheless, at the end of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century, although literature acquired different positions within the system of the arts, it was generally still included in it as one of them.⁴⁷ Although Tatarkiewicz assumes a new division already in the nineteenth century,⁴⁸ most aesthetic theories—think of the art systems of German classical philosophy—include literature among the arts and, indeed, at least in the first half of the century, in a prominent place (as in the aesthetics of Schelling,

⁴⁵Cf. Tatarkiewicz (1974, 407–408).

⁴⁶Cf. Ullrich (2002, 577–581).

⁴⁷It is interesting to specify that within the most well-known system of the arts, literature was still commonly identified with the term ‘poetry’. In eighteenth-century France and throughout Europe, in fact, ‘littérature’ or the expression ‘belles lettres’ tended to maintain the general humanist meaning of *humanae litterae*, which, in addition to poetry, included disciplines such as grammar, rhetoric, philosophy and history. Starting from the intensification of the *Querelles des Anciens et des Modernes*, when the historicisation of ancient models caused the decrease of their prestige in education and their normative power, a complex story of semantic shifts and re-semantisations started and, with multiple adjustments, a concept of ‘literature’ as a word for literary works of art as we know it gradually emerges. For the troubled lexical development of the word ‘literature’ in its approach to the semantic field of art, cf. Rosenberg (2002, 668–678). For a socio-cultural picture of the changes in the concept of literature and reading, see also Hauser (1953c, 38–87/33–74).

⁴⁸Tatarkiewicz (1980, 116–120).

Solger and Hegel. Later, this place will gradually be taken by music; think of the proposals of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Wagner).

As has already been said several times, finally, in the twentieth century, the system of the arts, through the work of the avant-garde, underwent numerous changes and actualised new possibilities, which went mainly towards experiences such as synesthesia and intermediality, where one art hybridised with the other. This process also concerned literature in its relationship with the rest of the arts. Moreover, the very concept of the system of the arts seemed to be in crisis in its classical form or, at least, to be enriched by arts that were difficult to classify with the previous criteria, from performance art to installation art or even to land art. However, the concept of art remained, for common sense, that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that is, of art as a macro-category capable of collecting very different arts and of literature as art between the arts, albeit in its peculiarity.

The path that I have summarised in the wake of Tatarkiewicz must be integrated with the first section of this chapter, as a necessary part of a reflection on the difference and specificity of literature compared to the other arts. As far as the main points are concerned, and inevitably leaving out many episodes of the history of aesthetics, the hypothesis followed shows how ontological reasoning on literature and its peculiarity cannot do without a historical perspective. Or, better, we now see how theoretically reasoning about literature and its relationship with the arts is calibrated upon a contemporary vision of the object of study that is, in fact, the result of a long history. It is a long history that is the history of a difference, which is articulated by approaches and separations between literature and the other arts, throughout the ages. Also in the historical evolution of the relationship between art and literature, the ontological dimension emerges: for example, when literature has been divided from the other arts, this division has been based above all on its distance from the material character of arts such as sculpture or architecture, and this is a characteristic trait of the ontological structure of literature; in the same way, to give another example, when, unlike the other arts, literature has approached prophecy or has been put in competition with philosophy, this was due mostly to its textual character and the properties of its linguistic medium.

In general, what I have tried to show in this chapter is the emergence, complex and articulated, of a difference between literature and the other arts. This difference has its first evidence from the point of view of our common perception of things and is maintained, with a greater degree of complexity, even if exposed to a more technical analysis of an ontological kind. Further, it has its own specific evolution from the historical-philosophical point of view where, through this evolution, it takes on the shape we deal with today. The same difference will run through the rest of the study, emerging in all its strength in the very peculiar way in which literature comes to terms with the issue of its end. Starting with the next chapter, I will focus on the specific tradition of the end of literature and on the even more specific tradition of the end of the novel, within the more general one of the end of art.

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3

The End of Literature

Trying to trace a genealogy of a tradition of the thesis of the ‘end of literature’ is like slipping the moorings and venturing out into the open ocean. The multiplicity of voices and approaches and the diversity of perspectives through which the topic has been dealt with and even just the meanings that have been attributed to this end are incredibly vast.

In this chapter, I will try to identify some significant moments of this tradition, relating it primarily to the more consolidated tradition of the thesis on the end of art, but also showing the possibility of some of its autonomous developments. The purpose is to trace the profile of a tradition within the tradition, providing an idea of its complexity by delineating some of its guiding threads.

If the discourse on the end of art most of the time has the pretension of being ‘transgeneric’, it does not seem that such an autonomous, in-depth and developed discourse has been carried out on the end, for example, of the figurative arts or music as singular art forms. At least, it was not carried out in such powerful terms and with the same success. As far as literature is concerned, it is fully included in discourses on the end of art and, in more than one case, holds a significant position. Nonetheless, there have also been several theoretical proposals which are focused specifically on

the end, the farewell or the death of literature, on literature in danger or on what comes after literature.

The discourse on the end of literature has deep roots and distant premises in time. Since Plato's time and the hostility towards mimetic art present in the *Republic*, it is a discourse that has to do with reflection on literature, on the relationship between literature and philosophy, and on the relationship between art and truth.¹ It has been associated with the philosophic-historical thought of an author like Vico and with the presence, in the recurring cycles in the history, of a primordial and mythical age, dominated by poetry and then degraded when the age of reason progresses.² Moreover, it is a reasoning that has certainly its closest modern premise in the so-called *Querelles des anciens et des modernes*, which had its fulcrum in France and then saw its expansion in Europe, especially in the German context.³ There is no doubt, however, that the proposal of a thesis of this kind belongs to the last two centuries and that, as a discourse, finds its origins in the framework of the Hegelian philosophy of art.

What I will examine here is how the tradition of the end of literature takes place in modernity and speaks of modernity.⁴ This tradition shows the impact that modernity has had on literature and the huge variety of solutions that literature adopts to face its end.

The core of this chapter lies in the thought that the complexity of the discourse on the end of literature once again brings out a peculiarity of the literary art form. Not only does an internal polysemy emerge regarding what the expression 'end of literature' can mean, but so too appears an autonomous reasoning exclusively oriented to literature, and even more specifically in the case of the novel. This is also the reason, as I pointed out above, why in this research, among all literary genres, I chose the novel as an exemplary genre to talk about literature in general: for no other genre

¹For an extensive analysis of the theoretical premises of the thesis on the end of art throughout the history of thought, see Kwon (2004, 24–144). Many of the observations made there on the end of art can also apply to the end of literature.

²A comparison between Vico and Hegel on the end of history and the end of art was recently proposed in Valagussa (2013, 95–111).

³Peter Szondi dedicated a series of fundamental lectures to the German reception of the *Querelles* in the years around 1800 (Szondi 1974a).

⁴Unlike other periodisations, the term 'modernity' will be used in the following pages as a synonym for 'contemporaneity' and will refer specifically to the last two centuries up to the present day.

has there been so much debate about its end. Although these debates take on a specific character that is particular to the genre in question and develops concepts derived from it, I consider them relevant to qualities proper to literature as a whole.

What follows is a survey through three different discourses on the end: the general discourse on the end of art, which finds within it the more specific discourse on the end of literature, and which, in turn, has in itself the even more particular discourse on the end of the novel. The three discourses unfold along common lines and through modes of expression that have to do with the encounter between the subject that comes to its end (art, literature, novel) and modernity. They also have a certain degree of autonomy from each other. To follow the paths of these three scenarios, I will rely on some of the most significant positions and also reconstructions of the discourse on the end, trying to make them interact with each other in an overall and articulated picture.

After a first introductory section on the topic (Sect. 1), the origins of this tradition are at the centre of the first part of this chapter: Hegel may be considered the primary source of this tradition, but we will see how his voice fits into a picture of positions on the end of literature, related or not to each other, which has a European dimension (Sect. 2). I will therefore show in broad terms how this tradition has unfolded, from a discourse integrated into the more general discourse on the end of art to, in recent decades, a specific discourse on the end of literature (Sect. 3). Lastly, I will focus on the even more specific tradition concerning the literary genre typical of modernity, that is, the novel. This will show how, in the end of the novel, the discourse on the end of literature is radicalised and expressed in all its power as a continuous reformulation of a genre that, in its end, always finds new ways of being reborn and continuing to be (Sect. 4).

1 A Tradition Within the Tradition

In her important book, Eva Geulen describes the tradition of the end of art as ‘a rumor [*Gerücht*] in the sense of a story, a claim, a speech act’ (Geulen 2002, 19/7). She points out that the issue of the end of art constitutes a topos that, starting with Hegel, has developed in terms of a discourse in

the Foucaultian sense. The object of this topos is identified not in itself but in the discourse that has developed around it. Through it, the profile of contemporary art emerges, showing also and above all the conditions and contradictions of the contemporaneity in which art takes place. The end of art presents itself as 'a founding myth of art, a privileged self-description of the art system' (Geulen 2002, 10/2), but at the same time as a form of knowledge capable of constituting a tradition that says something about modernity (Geulen 2002, 30/15).

Geulen's analysis, which develops through a reading of authors such as Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Benjamin and Adorno, underlines how the discourse on the end of art brings with it a radicality that does not focus on a particular kind of art or a particular era, but on the end of art as such (Geulen 2002, 9/1–2). As will also be seen in the following pages, this is undoubtedly a decisive aspect and constitutes one of the strengths regarding the incisiveness and duration that the discourse on the end of art has had in the last two centuries, until now. Partly diverging from this in many ways valuable generalisation, what I want to show here is the presence of a further discourse, partly a discourse within the general discourse and partly an autonomous one, which has dealt with the specific form of literary art in the same radical way. This tradition within the tradition is configured as a subcategory of the more general discourse on the end of art. But, at the same time, due to the specific peculiarity of literature compared to the other arts, it has assumed its own particular configuration, to the point of producing a further specification concerning the genre of the novel.

The general framework in which the tradition of the end of literature fits is for a large part similar to that of the end of art, so that some remarks that are made about the thesis on the end of art in general and its developments can be considered as adequate also for their specification regarding literature. As with the problem of the end of art, the end of literature does not trivially mean the interruption of literary production. And as with the problem of the end of art, the supposed tradition of an end of literature has mainly to do with the relationship between literature and modernity: whenever the end of literature has come up, we have looked at the constitution of modernity and its crises through this specific form of art. At the same time, literature clashes with and crosses modernity,

changing radically, but without being subjugated.⁵ Most of the time, in declaring the end of literature the intention is to state that it is transformed so as not to cease: it lives its end as a continuous renewal.

Like the thesis on the end of art, a discourse on the end of literature also rises in the art-philosophical and literary context of Germany in the decades around 1800 and draws its basic features—at least at an early stage—from the debates of the time.⁶ This is not by chance, and the main reason for this is twofold: firstly, within a general institutionalisation of thought on art as aesthetics or philosophy of art, it is precisely in this context—especially with Romanticism and Idealism—that the reasoning on literature touches one of its highest peaks and lays the foundations for contemporary literary criticism, literary theory, and also what can be called contemporary literary aesthetics or the philosophy of literature⁷; secondly, if the end of literature is the expression of the relationship between literature and modernity, it is in the German context of the decades around 1800 that the theoretical discourse on modernity received a decisive impulse, in the sense that it was precisely in the intellectual environment of the time that the concept of modernity took on a markedly philosophical value, especially—in this case—with Hegel.⁸

Nevertheless, from the very beginning, there may be particularly comparable positions regarding the literary artwork and its end, which may not have had any contact with the main German tradition or with Hegelian thought. Even with regard to the thesis on the end of art and its developments, the reference to Hegel and the thesis itself are not always explicit and one can identify a discourse that describes the same phenomenon, but from a different perspective and almost entirely independent of the

⁵In this regard, Paul de Man's reflections on the relationship between literature and modernity remain valid (cf. de Man 1971, 142–165).

⁶Werle rightly posits his own analysis of Hegel's end of art explicitly as an 'idealistic issue', that is, a question that crosses and feeds on the general cultural and philosophical context of the time Werle (2011, 17–28).

⁷Cf., among others, Zima (1995, 1), Bowie (1997, 1–16), Fusillo (2009, 39), and Urbich (2011, 41).

⁸For Habermas, Hegel was, from a philosophical point of view, the first for whom modernity became a problem (Habermas 1985, 57/43).

German philosopher.⁹ As far as the end of literature is concerned, independence from the German tradition and Hegelian thought is in some cases much more pronounced. The multiplicity of cases is varied and, as for the thesis on the end of art, positions have not always produced, consolidated or even simply participated—posing as recognised and organic options—in a general discourse on the end of literature. Some arise as isolated positions concerning a central problem of the literary art form.

In general, the complexity of the discourse on the end finds in literature a case and a development of its own. In other words, literary art in itself poses the issue of its end, doing so without necessarily having to go back to a superordinate tradition and, on many occasions, in a clear detachment from all the other arts—sometimes in a contrast that accentuates its problematic nature. Although there are certainly cases in which reference to the end of art is present, this means that, even regardless of the relationship of filiation and influence among the various voices within a discourse that has consolidated over the years, literature and the ways in which it has crossed the ages pose similar, independent or, in some cases, overlapping problems to the end of art generally. In this way, the forms and modalities in which it faces its end prove to be proper to its particular condition.

2 The Origins of the End

If one wants to identify a kind of founder of the tradition of the end of literature, one cannot but refer to Hegel. As will be seen in greater detail in the next chapter, specifically devoted to the interpretation of the German thinker, literature occupies a prominent place in Hegel's philosophy of art and a special relationship between literature and the end-of-art thesis can be drawn from his thought—a relationship that shows both the highly problematic character of the literary art form and, at the same time, the end of art in all its radicality. Among the Hegelian texts, the main work, besides the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*,

⁹In his overview of the persistence of the end of art after Hegel's death, Duarte divides the positions in which reference to him and his thesis constitutes 'implicit resonances' (Marx, Nietzsche, Lukács, Benjamin) from 'the explicit contemporary approaches to the question of the end of art, which also refer to Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*' (Heidegger, Adorno, Danto) (Duarte 2006, 378).

from which one can derive what passes as the ‘thesis on the end of art’ is undoubtedly the *Lectures on Fine Art*. Since it is a question of identifying the origins of a tradition, it is necessary to open up a brief parenthesis, also useful for the following chapter, on the editorial story of the work, which goes by the title of Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*.

As is well known, Hegel dedicated several courses to the philosophy of art: one in Heidelberg in 1818 and four in Berlin in 1820/1821, 1823, 1826 and 1828/1829. After Hegel’s death in 1831, Heinrich Gustav Hotho, a former student of Hegel’s, on behalf of the *Verein von Freunden des Verewigten* [Association of friends of the deceased], published between 1835 and 1838, and then in its second edition in 1842, a work called *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik (Ästh. I-III)*, which collected in a single reworking a manuscript by Hegel, that we no longer have, and some notebooks of the students who had attended the courses of the philosopher. For more than a century, the Hegelian work that everyone could read and that condensed Hegel’s thought on art had not been written directly by Hegel.

Especially since the 1980s, mainly thanks to the work of Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert and the *Hegel Archiv* group in Bochum, Hotho’s editorial methodology has been strongly questioned and it has been shown that his personal intervention in the compilation of the *Lectures* has been consistent and, in some cases, even invasive.¹⁰ This critical work, both philological and theoretical, has led to the increasing abandonment of Hotho’s edition and to the publication of some of the remaining students’ notebooks. Some of them have recently also been included in the series of the *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Niklas Hebing and Walter Jaeschke from 2015.¹¹

¹⁰On the editorial history of the aesthetic manuscripts and their relevance in comparison with the version of Hotho, see Gethmann-Siefert (1991), Pinna (2002) and Gethmann-Siefert (2005, 15–28). Hebing has recently criticized the textual reconstruction proposed by Gethmann-Siefert of the Hotho manuscript of the course of 1823 (Hebing 2015b).

¹¹So far, they have been published independently: the Ascheberg manuscript of the winter semester course of 1820/1821 (*Ascheberg 1820/1821**); that of Hotho of the 1823 course (*Hotho 1823**) and the French notebook owned by Cousin, which always contains the same course (*Esthétique*); the notebooks of Kehler and von der Pfordten of 1826 course (*Kehler 1826* and *von der Pfordten 1826*); the introduction and first part noted by Libelt of the winter course of 1828/1829 (*Libelt 1828/1829a*, *Libelt 1828/1829b*); the passages of the chapter on the music of the same manuscript have been published in Spanish (*Libelt 1828/1829c*); the Heimann manuscript of the winter course

If, on the one hand, Hotho's 1835/1842 version is compromised by an invasive reconstructive intervention that leads us to consider it with caution, on the other hand, the quantity and the organicity of the information, together with the lack of a complete text on the philosophy of art directly penned by Hegel, continue to make it fascinating. Given this picture, which has been the focus of a substantial part of the debate on Hegel's philosophy of art in the last years, a first consideration to make here is that if Hegel is the starting point of a tradition on the end of literature, then it is, for the most part, in the only version that has been available for decades, namely that drawn up by Hotho.¹²

As for Hegel's thought on the end of art a more detailed discussion can be found in the next chapter, but it can already be said in advance that Hegel never spoke of a 'thesis on the end of art' (much less a 'death of art') and that what can be derived from his *Lectures* and ascribed to such a label certainly does not trivially refer to a cessation of the production of artworks. In the *Hegel-Forschung*, the interpreters have attributed many meanings to the expression 'end of art' and in general it is a concept that describes a decisive moment for art in modernity and especially in the way of understanding art by those who produce and those who receive it. From a more strictly textual point of view, the Hegelian description that comes closest to the end of art corresponds to the passage in which Hegel says that art, in modernity, has become a 'thing of the past', has taken on a past character (*Vergangenheitscharakter*). If, after the pre-artistic period of the symbolic art form of most ancient civilisations, in ancient Greece art stood at the centre of society and indicated the political and cultural path to follow, portraying the deeds of the great heroes and divinities—just think of classical tragedy—in the modern world art has taken on a more lateral role. It has, in a certain sense, taken a back seat and has devoted itself to the description of the ordinary and of everyday life. Literature,

1828/1829 (*Heimann 1828/1829*). In the *Gesammelte Werke*, instead, two volumes have appeared so far: the first contains the edition of the manuscript by Ascheberg (*Ascheberg 1820/1821*) and that of Hotho, with the variants of that of Kromayr (*Hotho 1823*), whereas the second gathers the manuscript von Griesheim of the course of 1826, with variants from an anonymous manuscript and from those of Garczynski, von Kehler, Löwee and von der Pfordten (*Griesheim 1826*).

¹²This is one of the reasons why the present book will take into account both Hotho's edition and the published students' notebooks, taking care to report any variations or differences between the different sources.

which in Hegel's system of the arts is in the exemplary position of being the highest art form, represents this passage in a paradigmatic way, no longer describing the heroic situations that stand as a model for society, but the daily life of ordinary people in the bourgeois society. It is in the passage of art and literature to what Hegel calls the 'prose of life' that poetry is, so to speak, 'proseicised'.

At the same time, an interpretation of the end of art in Hegel must take into account his systematic apparatus, as described in the *Lectures on Art* and also in the *Encyclopaedia*. From this point of view, art is the first form of absolute spirit, that is, of the last and highest stage of the progression of spirit, preceding religion and philosophy. In this sense—a less philological sense, which takes on the forms of absolute spirit in a diachronic way that is not totally correct, according to the Hegelian text—art leaves room for the other two forms of spirit. The literary art form is placed at the end of the system of the arts, summarising and completing the Hegelian discourse on art, and because it shares with religion and, above all, with philosophy, the expressive medium of language, finds itself in a position of passage that takes on ambiguous forms and is difficult to frame within the different realms of spirit. In this way, literature comes close to what Hegel calls the 'prose of thought' and experiences the risk of a sort of 'philosophisation'.

In the next chapter, the examination of the thesis on the end of art in Hegel will be deepened and articulated with specific reference to literature, bearing in mind these two broad categories: an epochal derivation, where the end is the tendency to ordinariness and the prose of life, and a systematic derivation, where the end is philosophisation. What is relevant at this moment is to point out that these Hegelian ends can be read as the basis of the discourse on the end of literature, but that they are not the only possible options. Several positions, besides the Hegelian one, have spoken in the same years, or shortly after, of an end to art, or at least the same discourse present in the thesis can be ascribed to them. Moreover, several have specifically focused on the end of literature or have given literature an important role in the issue of the end. While no one has had the same power and influence and no one can be credited with the kind of originality found in Hegel's thought, it is useful to recall some alternative readings of the end of art to show how literature in itself, with its peculiarities, has placed the discourse of its end.

Among the possible options, recent studies have tried to shed light on another personality belonging to the German-speaking context of the time and who is worth mentioning—with some caution—together with Hegel: Carl Gustav Jochmann, who in the 1828 book *Über die Sprache* [On Language], published a text with the title *Die Rückschritte der Poesie* [The Regressions of Poetry], which should be included in a survey of the origins of the end of literature in modernity.¹³

Although his work is of undoubted interest, Jochmann's influence has been rather limited and he is certainly not an author who can be considered comparable to Hegel as a source of a possible tradition of the end of literature. Nevertheless, it makes sense to take Jochmann's work into consideration here for various reasons. First of all, because it is a text that appeared in the same years as Hegel's *Lectures*, demonstrating how theoretical attention to literary topics and their relationship with modernity was particularly compelling in those years. Moreover, because Jochmann's text specifically focuses on literature, it thus offers a remarkable example of an approach to the end of literature that is basically independent from the end of art in general. Jochmann's *Rückschritte* is an example of an autonomous voice from a coeval discourse that continued in the following years, almost isolated, but which shows the urgency of the issue of the end of literature in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Jochmann's analysis is placed in a framework of the philosophy of history. In origin, there is a remote, primordial era in which civilisation is at the beginning of its history. This era is totally dominated by poetry, which has a unique and undisputed dominion in the field of knowledge. The

¹³Jochmann is an author who has remained in the shadows for many decades and who is still not particularly at the centre of the debate. He was the subject of consideration in the twentieth century in the circles of the Frankfurt School, which contributed to a certain extent to his rediscovery: in 1937 Benjamin re-published in the *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* a partial version of Jochmann's work, with a text as an introduction (Benjamin 1999), and in his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno judged Jochmann to have comprehended the end of art 'even more perspicaciously' than Hegel (Adorno 1970, 501/337). In 1955, Werner Kraft wrote the first edition of an extensive volume that attempted to give a biographical profile of the author, contextualising him in his small circle of friends and in his time, and addressing different aspects of his thinking, from the political to the philosophical-linguistic to the religious (Kraft 1972). In the research of recent years, the attention of scholars such as Ulrich Kronauer or Paolo D'Angelo has led to yet another rediscovery of the author, which recently culminated, for instance, also in the publication of the journal *Jochmann-Studien*, completely dedicated to the study of this author.

truth-value of poetry is all-encompassing and, through poetry, ancient peoples—represented at the highest level by Homer—produce the only way of understanding the world. Constituting the memory of a community, it ‘encompasses whatever is important and pleasing to man in all his horizons, as history and religion, as art and knowledge, all his memories and hopes, all science and all pleasure’ (Jochmann 1982, 4). Poetry is guided by the faculty of fantasy (*Phantasie*), which is a faculty that collects sensations and produces images that were not there before, typical of children and primordial peoples, and opposed to imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), which is characteristic of the intellect and proper to scientific knowledge (Jochmann 1982, 5). The poetic verse—of which Jochmann underlines the musical aspect and usefulness at a mnemonic level in a predominantly oral context—is the principal and most genuinely expressive modality, permeating the relationship of the human being with the world (Jochmann 1982, 9). But with the advancement of civilisation up to modern times, poetry is no longer attributed the same centrality: the modern age is no longer suitable for poetry and verse and is dominated by prose. It is a written prose, which is that of science and history. The latter two have replaced poetry in its role as the bearer of truth-value and confined poetry to a dimension that antiquity did not know, that of aesthetic appreciation and amusement: ‘the high seriousness of earlier poetry has become more or less obvious fun, and from the teacher of the people has become the pastime partner of some people of good education’ (Jochmann 1982, 4). Poetry as a guide for peoples has become ‘almost only a pleasure for the most delicate ear of a few’ (Jochmann 1982, 8).

As has been noted,¹⁴ the regressions of poetry correspond to the progress of society and, although Jochmann’s writing sounds somewhat nostalgic, the loss of centrality of poetry in modern times is not experienced with negativity: the modern world is just different from the primitive one. The potentiality that poetry once had can no longer be spent in modernity, which instead needs new and diversified skills. The ancient function of the epic poem has ceased and it is now read as a collection of beliefs (Jochmann 1982, 19–20); poetry in general no longer returns the real world but the realm of illusions (Jochmann 1982, 27). Nevertheless, if

¹⁴Cf. Kronauer (1982, XV) and D’Angelo (1985, 35–36).

poetry has fundamentally lost its attractiveness and effectiveness, this does not mean that it has absolutely lost its value in society (Jochmann 1982, 25). Losing grip on reality and the role of predominant knowledge in the world, poetry takes on the function of expressing the inner world of the human soul and of arousing emotions (Jochmann 1982, 28). For this reason, the genre of poetry in modernity becomes lyrical (Jochmann 1982, 30), which in any case should have a role, however lateral. While poetry is no longer objective in reflecting the real, it becomes subjective, concerned with sentiment and expression. And this is all the more so since, Jochmann notes with concern, it is increasingly taking root in the cultural world of the time, demonstrating itself to be ‘the proof of an essential fracture of our society’ (Jochmann 1982, 49), given that society should be the field of exteriority and not of personal closure in oneself. The only poetic form destined to remain is the lyrical one, which maintains the original connection with music—but not as ‘poetry of intuition’ (*Poesie der Anschauung*), not as poetry that represents through images, since they have lost all credibility in representing the world, but as ‘poetry of feeling’ (*Poesie der Gefühl*), capable of stirring the soul and arousing emotions (Jochmann 1982, 45–46).

In general, if there are differences between Jochmann’s positions and Hegel’s—from the different distribution of epochs, such as the lack of a pre-artistic stage in Jochmann corresponding to symbolic art in Hegel, to the identification of lyrics as a literary genre of modernity—similarities seem not to be lacking either. However, the comparison with Hegel, whose lectures on the philosophy of art Jochmann could not have known about, can be conceived only at a broad level since the two positions ultimately fit different and distant thoughts.¹⁵

Admittedly and beyond the convergences, it is precisely in the difference and distance from Hegel and the main discourse on the end of art and literature that Jochmann’s account gains its own value. It shows how the

¹⁵Cf. D’Angelo (1985, 42–51). One question that could be raised is that of possible common sources. The most recent criticism, for instance, has indicated as unlikely a derivation of Jochmann’s thought from that of Vico, as Benjamin thought (Benjamin 1999, 584), whereas a reference to Herder’s reflection on the philosophy of language seems much more verifiable, where there is the development of human civility in conjunction with the development of language and a progressive decline of poetic expression (Kronauer 1982, XVI–XIX; D’Angelo 1985, 31–41).

discourse on the end of literature was present at the time in different ways and perspectives and how even an author as unusual as Jochmann posed a problem of this kind. He was obviously no stranger to the cultural context of the time, which is not perfectly superimposable for biographical reasons to the Hegelian one, but in which the sense of an epochal change in society and, at the same time, in literature, was perceived. For instance, considering Jochmann's wanderings and stay in England, D'Angelo has significantly compared Jochmann's text to Thomas Love Peacock's 1820 essay *The Four Ages of Poetry*, where the four eras of the world (gold, silver, bronze, copper) correspond to four stages of poetry whose relevance, in the last era, the modern one, was eclipsed by science (D'Angelo 1985, 51, n23). Peacock's tones are different from those of Jochmann and the comparison is always placed at the conceptual level. Nonetheless, Peacock's text, which aroused the famous reply, written in 1821 and published posthumously in 1840, *A Defence of Poetry* by Percy Bysshe Shelley, could easily fit into a history of the end-of-literature thesis, as another position unrelated to the wider Hegelian discourse. In this way, just by starting with Jochmann, we see the opening of interlacing positions on the end of literature, even outside the German context.

Beyond the case of Jochmann, it is in fact possible to further articulate the discourse on the end in the first half of the nineteenth century. As already mentioned, the great historical-cultural premise of the discourse on the end of literature (as of art) is the so-called *Querelles des anciens et des modernes*, that is, the artistic and literary debate that developed within the *Académie française* at the end of the seventeenth century. It saw two opposing factions, the *Ancients*, represented by Nicolas Boileau and which supported the superiority of the classical ideal and the need for its imitation, and the *Modernes*, led by Charles Perrault and which confidently expressed the ambition of a specifically modern literary and artistic expression.¹⁶ It was a debate that addressed the issue of the encounter between literature and modernity and which had considerable fortune and influence, so much so as to powerfully enter the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Germany, to the point of involving authors such as Herder,

¹⁶For two recent contributions analysing the whole event, see Fumaroli (2001) and Lecoq (2001).

Goethe, Schiller and the Schlegel brothers.¹⁷ The *Querelle* emphasised the diversity of the modern with respect to everything that had preceded it, deepened the feeling of caesura and novelty of the time, and prepared the field for a discourse on the end that became explicit only a few years later.

It is this discourse that imposes itself philosophically with Hegel, but not only with him and not only in Germany. Hans Robert Jauss points out that an interweaving of voices discussing the end of art and the end of literature unfolded in Europe in the period around 1830. He contextualises Hegel's thesis on the end of art and shows how the years around Hegel's death are crucial for the discourse on it. The positions identified by Jauss essentially concern facts and proposals concerning literature, so much so that one could speak directly of an analysis of the end of literature. He also shows that the discourse on the end of literature is not only German, but is certainly open to France and, in an era of the consolidation of national literatures, reaches a European dimension that traverses the particular states. Alongside the *Vergangenheitscharacter* present in the Hegelian philosophy of art, Jauss brings together different factors conceived as a single common feeling of the time, especially after Goethe's and Hegel's deaths. One of these is the influence of Heinrich Heine's claim about the end of the art period, which had Goethe as its highest representative.¹⁸ Another factor is the artistic-political uprising of the literary movement of the *Junges Deutschland*. This movement stood on the long echo of the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* and referred to the July Revolution of 1830 in France, becoming the main player of the so-called German *Vormärz* and positioning itself as protagonist of an epochal turning point in open contrast with previous German literature and culture. In the same years, also in France, two prominent voices indicated an epochal passage that made the sense of an end for literature resound, namely Stendhal and Victor

¹⁷Cf. Jauss (1970a) and Szondi (1974a).

¹⁸In his review of Wolfgang Menzel's *Die deutsche Literatur* in 1828—i.e. already before the death of Hegel (1831) and Goethe (1832)—he wrote about the 'literary period, which begins with Goethe's appearance and has only now reached its end' (Heine 1993, 238). Three years later, in his *Französische Maler*, he reiterates: '[m]y old prophecy of the end of the art period, which began at Goethe's cradle and will end at his coffin, seems to be near its fulfilment' (Heine 1980, 47). Heine's thesis is different from Hegel's for many reasons, first of all for its explicitly prophetic tone and a more determined and limited historical framework. For a comparison between Hegel and Heine on the concept of the end of art see, for example: Peters (2007) and Schmidt (2008).

Hugo. On the one hand, in the preface to his autobiographical work *Souvenirs d'égotisme* of 1832, Stendhal questions himself on a transformation that he perceives as epochal from the point of view of the poetic spirit.¹⁹ This spirit seems to have died to the spirit of doubt, which announces the realism of a subject who finds herself at the mercy of history, questioning the cognitive character and validity of the self-representation of romantic subjectivity and decreeing the decline of the fictitious world of poetry. Hugo, on the other hand, announces a few years earlier in his *Preface to Cromwell* of 1828 the entry of literature into modernity. It comes after two other epochs: the primitive, eternal and primordial, represented by the lyric, and the ancient, exemplified in its solemnity and simplicity by the epic. The dominant characteristic of modern times is the balance—as is well known—of the fundamental element of the grotesque and its counterpart, which is no longer the beautiful, but the sublime. The literary form proper to this age is the drama, which represents life in its infinite facets. In summary, Jauss points out that reading together Hegel, Heine, the *Junges Deutschland*, Stendhal, Hugo, and their reflections on the end of literature leads to a partial loss of the specificity of national literature, but shows ‘tendencies towards a literary epochal change [...], which sooner or later also gained recognition in other European literatures: the break with the primacy of a classical-humanistic aesthetic, the turn to the ‘prose of life’, combined with the doubt about the right of existence of poetry in general, the formation of new literary forms between poet and publicist, but above all the opening of art to the history and flow of the times’ (Jauss 1970b, 142–143). Jauss shows how the discourse of the end of literature, with different feelings and intentions, is particularly present in the first half of the nineteenth century and, directly or indirectly connecting to the Hegelian position, supports and complicates the ways of its path. This is a path that can be enriched by the emergence, especially in the German context and in this case with a well-established Hegelian derivation, of the discourse on the ugly or the no-longer-beautiful (think of Karl Rosenkranz and his *Ästhetik des Häßlichen* of 1853), which comes to flank

¹⁹Jauss’ essay opens with the discussion of Stendhal’s passage: ‘[l]e génie poétique est mort, mais le génie du soupçon est venu au monde’ (Jauss 1970b, 107–109).

and undermine the centrality of beauty in the aesthetics of the time.²⁰ It can recover Peacock's reflections in England and then unfold through the considerations on the end of literature and literary criticism in Russia, with authors such as Aleksander Puškin and Nikolaj Gogol' among others, after the Decembrist revolt.²¹ And it can even touch the artistic parable of an Italian writer like Alessandro Manzoni, whose attention to history gradually silenced and replaced his own artistic-literary creation.²²

In the first half of the nineteenth century, therefore, the positions within the discourse on the end of literature seem to be many; they often have different meanings and are distributed among different European contexts. The situation certainly sees a voice like Hegel's as decisive, especially from a philosophical point of view, for the origin of the discourse on the end of literature, but also the cultural environment before Hegel and shortly after Hegel's death was sensitive to an epochal turn in literature that can be conceived of as its end (which is always to be understood as a radical change or a new beginning and never as a cessation of literary production). The reasoning on the end describes a phase of passage framed from a specific historical point of view, but at the same time also theorises a particular quality of literature's development in general. This is an end which has a German barycentre, but also branches and autonomous voices in the European situation of the time and which denotes a very specific way in which literature deals with modernity.

²⁰For an insightful reconstruction of the concept of the ugly in Hegel and its reception among Hegelians such as Karl Rosenkranz, but also Heinrich Gustav Hotho, Christian Hermann Weisse, and Friedrich Theodor Vischer, see the fundamental study of Iannelli (2007).

²¹See the contributions of the volume edited by Peters and Schmidt (2007), which, starting from Hegel and Heine's reflections on the end of art, analyse Russian literature between 1825 and 1842 in a predominantly sociocultural key based on Pierre Bordieu's approach.

²²After 1827, when he completed the re-elaboration of the first draft of the *Promessi Sposi*, Manzoni wrote only theoretical or historical texts, no longer fiction. The case is related, in addition to the personal neuroses of the author, to the more general discourse on the end of the art in D'Angelo (2013).

3 The Tradition of the End of Literature

Greek tragedy perished differently from all the other, older sister-arts: it died by suicide, as the result of an irresolvable conflict, which is to say tragically, while all the others died the most beautiful and peaceful deaths, fading away at a great age. (Nietzsche 1988a, 75/54)

So the young Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* notoriously introduces the death of that supreme artistic form, Attic Tragedy, that managed to keep the opposing energies characteristic of the Greek spirit, the Dionysian and the Apollonian, in balance in itself, and that had found in Sophocles' tragedy its greatest representative. It is a death that is poetically announced to the cry of: 'Tragedy is dead! And with it we have lost poetry itself! Away, away with you, withered, wasted epigones! Away to Hades, so that you may for once eat your fill of the crumbs left by those who once were masters!' (Nietzsche 1988a, 75/55). This death concerns tragedy as a specific expression of human artistic creativity, but affects the entire Greek world, producing an unbridgeable and terrible void. The rise of the so-called New Attic Comedy is responsible for this death, and the author who made the circumstance possible for the introduction of this new artistic form is Euripides and his tragedy. Although it is introduced as a continuation of the ancient model, Euripides' plays propose a kind of theatre that is a degraded configuration of the previous one. He no longer stages the tragic hero, but brings the spectator on stage: the people of everyday life, who in this way are not only audience but also protagonists, see their own double on stage, recognises themselves, and have thus learned to become rational judges of what they see represented (Nietzsche 1988a, 76/56). By taking the viewer on stage, what Euripides did in his tragedy was introduce a series of situations and events of common life in order to eliminate 'the original and all-powerful Dionysiac element from tragedy and to re-build tragedy in a new and pure form on the foundations of a non-Dionysiac art, morality, and view of the world' (Nietzsche 1988a, 82/59). In destroying the balance between Apollonian and Dionysian, Euripides is only the 'mask' through which 'an altogether newborn daemon', i.e. Socrates, speaks (Nietzsche 1988a, 83/60). Socrates

introduces into the Greek world a process that sees a rationalistic spirit expand in an inversely proportional way to the retreat of the Dionysian. This process led to a general degradation of Greek society in its creative potential and in its relationship with life, which perpetrated itself in the subsequent European culture and which, at that time, Nietzsche strongly hoped would be opposed by the Dionysian potential of Wagner's music.

The case of the young Nietzsche offers a further example of how the discourse on the end of literature continues its journey into the second half of the nineteenth century. In this version, literature, represented by the significant case of tragedy, is taken into account in a peculiar way and is explicitly distinguished from other arts as the bearer of a specific fate ('differently from all the other, older sister-arts'). It not only ends, but also dies and even commits suicide. It seems to have in itself the germ of its own death and this germ consists in the introduction, on the one hand, of a daily dimension with Euripides' plays and, on the other hand, of a philosophical attitude with Socrates. These intertwine with each other and recall the two possibilities mentioned above of the end of the literature by Hegel, the former tending towards ordinariness and the latter towards philosophisation.

It is not a question here of setting up an in-depth parallel between the two authors, nor of proposing an examination of the various forms that the thesis on the end of art within the various phases of Nietzschean thought assumes, which can be found excellently reconstructed in other recent studies.²³ What is interesting to note here is that the 'rumor' about the end of literature continues in parallel with that about the end of art, sometimes in an explicitly autonomous way—as in the case of the young Nietzsche—while at others integrated into the more general discourse or in parallel with it, as happens, for instance, in the more mature Nietzsche of *Human, All Too Human*.

In the fourth part of the first volume of this work, *From the Souls of Artists and Writers*, Nietzsche deals with the decline of art and examines the condition of contemporary literature as a specific example within the framework of the fate of art in general. The last paragraphs describe how

²³Cf. Geulen (2002, 41–64), Vercellone (2013, 40–55), Jung (2017, 227–300), and Snyder (2018, 87–146).

art has lost its power and the vital richness it brought with it in favour of the rationality that permeates the modern world. Human beings no longer have faith in the transfiguration of ideas that modernity judges as religious or philosophical errors. Accordingly, artistic expression as it was conceived and conveyed in past centuries is irreparably compromised: 'that species of art can never flourish again which, like the *Divina Commedia*, the pictures of Raphael, the frescoes of Michelangelo, the Gothic cathedrals, presupposes not only a cosmic but also a metaphysical significance in the objects of art. A moving tale will one day be told how there once existed such an art, such an artist's faith' (Nietzsche 1988b, 180/102). The person of science takes the place of the artist. At the same time, as the world gains the highest knowledge and awareness of art, art heads towards its final decline, risking becoming just a pale memory (Nietzsche 1988b, 185–186/105–106).

In this context, paragraph 221. *The revolution in poetry* takes literature as an example of this decadence. Literary art, in fact, is the victim of a deception that would consist in the acceptance of a false and empty freedom. In abandoning the strict discipline of unity of action, place and time, and the formal and stylistic constraints that characterised the eighteenth-century French authors' works, German literature at the turn of the 1800s and French literature after Voltaire—for Nietzsche, the last great playwright and writer in prose—abandoned themselves to the illusion of 'a kind of Rousseauesque state of nature in art and experimented' (Nietzsche 1988b, 181/103). The writers have traded the grace and simplicity of Greek origin, brought back for a period in vogue by French writers, for an unbridled and self-referential experimentalism, which leads literature to become the imitation of itself and of its ancient glories. It turns into the allegorical and generic mask of a real world, which has been irremediably lost and from which literature blindly continues to drift away. Literature, as a particular representative of the general condition of art, experiences a decline that makes it the memory of itself, the memory of something it can no longer recover: 'art moves towards its dissolution' (Nietzsche 1988b, 183/104).

In this second case, literature is the key—but not the only—example of an end that concerns art in general. There is no reference to an end of literature as such. There is an end of art as a whole, and literature continues

to be part of a broader discourse, which it helps to constitute and of which it is, in a decisive way, a part.

Stimulated above all by the technological innovations and by the revolutions in the artistic field of the historical avant-gardes, the discourse on the end of art during the twentieth century has been consolidated and in a certain sense institutionalised. This discourse has been increasingly intertwined with those on the relationship between art and modernity that has already taken hold, for example, with Marx on the incompatibility of art with capitalist society or Baudelaire on the figure of the artist.²⁴

Nietzsche is the first of the great figures in the discourse on the end of art after Hegel identified by Geulen, followed in the twentieth century by the figures of Heidegger, Benjamin and Adorno. As mentioned above, she points out that the power of this discourse has benefited from the radicality of considering art, at the moment of its end, as art in general. If one wants to find a discourse on the end of literature, in these cases it is carried out mainly within the more general framework or must be found in more specific and autonomous reflections, and then brought back later to the discourse on the end as such. This is a feature of authors such as Heidegger, Benjamin and Adorno, but it could be said to be a feature of the whole early part of the twentieth century.

Heidegger praises Hegel in his *Nietzsche* for having identified 'the end of great art as such' (Heidegger 1996, 83/84) and, in these general terms, he refers to Hegel's *Vorlesungen* in the *Nachwort* of the *Origin of the Work of Art* as 'the most comprehensive reflection on the nature of art that the West possesses – comprehensive because it stems from metaphysics' (Heidegger 1977, 68/77–78). Heidegger there wonders, in the light of Hegel's thesis on the end of art, whether art is still a constitutive and central way in which the truth of our historical existence manifests (Heidegger 1977, 68/78).²⁵ Heidegger does not give a definitive answer and puts it back on the table, questioning whether Hegel himself, who still remains within the framework of Western metaphysical thought (of which, indeed, his thought is the fulfilment), formulates it radically enough. Art in modernity

²⁴A discussion of the positions of Marx and Baudelaire (to which Heine and Nietzsche are added) on modernity as part of a discourse on the end of art is present in Mecacci (2009).

²⁵Cf. Geulen (2002, 153–158/120–124).

no longer fulfils a fundamental need as it had in antiquity, precisely because it is understood through the metaphysical subject-object relationship as the object of a subjectivistic aesthetic experience (*Erlebnis*), a technical production or entertaining commodity. It is therefore taken away by the historical-cultural specificity of its world and its most authentic meaning.²⁶ Nevertheless, in the *Origin of the Work of Art* the artwork, conceived in an ontological and non-metaphysical way, is still regarded as a possible place where, in the crucial struggle between concealing and revealing, earth and world, one can confront modern nihilism and experience (in the sense of *Erfahrung*)²⁷ the disclosure of truth: '[t]he art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening up, i.e., this deconcealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work. In the artwork, the truth of what is has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work' (Heidegger 1977, 26/38). As is well known, the key examples of this text come from the architectural arts, a temple at Paestum, and figurative arts, namely Vincent van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes*.²⁸ To find an extensive reflection on literature, we need to move on to the essays dedicated by the late Heidegger to poetry and language.²⁹ There, poetic language appears as the privileged field where an experience of openness of being can take place, and this through the listening by the philosopher of poets such as George or Rilke and, above all, Hölderlin, and through a thinking that becomes poetic.³⁰ In Heidegger, therefore, there is not an explicit discourse on the end of literature, but a revival of the Hegelian discourse on the end of art in general and a

²⁶Cf. Sinnerbrink (2004).

²⁷In his comparison between Heidegger and the Hegelian thesis on the end of art, Amoroso emphasizes the importance of the positive concept of *Erfahrung* over the negative one of *Erlebnis* in the Heideggerian interpretation of Hegel's thesis (Amoroso 2015).

²⁸For an interpretation of the relationship between Heidegger and Hegel on the end of art, with particular attention to figurative and pictorial art, see Pippin (2014, 96–130).

²⁹On Heidegger's conception of poetry and the relationship between poetry and literature, see Halliburton (1981).

³⁰In her volume Geulen disrupts the temporal order, analysing Heidegger last, after Benjamin and Adorno, and proposing an original thesis. She invites one in this regard to look at Heidegger's lectures on Hölderlin and to consider the poet as the initiator of an alternative way to Hegel in the possible discourse on the end of art, since for Heidegger Hölderlin is he 'who rips the metaphysics apart'. His poetry does not belong to the domain of metaphysics, under which the Western aesthetic tradition has remained until now, and in this sense its position can be considered a completely different perspective from the Hegelian one, a distinct origin of the discourse on the end of art (Geulen 2002, 170–175/134–139).

radicalisation of it through its integration into the fundamental issues of his thought. Heidegger's view has different points of contact with Hegel's, but a completely different outcome and, especially in his late reflection, poetry is conceived as a central way for disclosing the truth.

Literature is quite important in Benjamin's conception of a non-auratic art as a further version of the end of art. It is not a question in Benjamin of a value judgement on literature or the attribution to it of a peculiar function. Rather, in advancing what one might construe as Benjamin's theory on the end of art, at stake is the examination of specific cases of literary artworks. Before his later works, it was rightly pointed out that Benjamin's studies on Baudelaire and the figure of the poet in modern times, and, above all, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, manifest 'a latent dimension of the end of art since Hegel' (Geulen 2002, 98/74). The text, written for his university qualification, can especially be considered as a reflection on the end of art, or at least on its crisis, not in the sense of the observation of a state of obsolescence of auratic art, but of an allegorical understanding of modernity through the rediscovery of a genre: German baroque drama. In its impossibility of achieving perfection, it 'does not mark the end of an epoch' (Benjamin 1974, 314/135), but continuously reopens and persistently rethinks its original character. With his examination of German baroque drama, Benjamin did not detect the death of a genre, as Nietzsche had done with tragedy. Nevertheless—and here partly like Nietzsche—he used a specific literary genre to rethink the entire previous aesthetic tradition and, with an eye to the parallelism with contemporary modernism represented above all by Expressionism, also prepared the conceptual field for his later reflection.³¹

It is, however, with *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* that Benjamin's reflection fits fully into the discourse on the end of art.³² In short, this renowned text shows how technological progress,

³¹This, in an extreme and partial summary, is the interpretation that Geulen (2002) proposes at 88–100/65–75.

³²In the second version of the text, Benjamin recalls Hegel's thesis of the end of art and somehow approaches it to his theory of the aura in two footnotes. In the first one, at paragraph VI, the reference is implicit and Benjamin attributes to Hegel the merit of having glimpsed, unlike the idealistic context, the distinction between the artwork's cult value and its exhibition value (Benjamin 2008, 357–358n3/44n10). In the second one, at the end of paragraph XI, the reference becomes more direct, when Benjamin discusses Hegel in the explanation of the meaning of beautiful semblance,

especially thanks to photography and cinema, has deprived the artwork of its 'aura'. He describes the notion of 'aura' as 'the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be' (Benjamin 1989, 355/23), that is, the uniqueness and authenticity proper to the art of the previous centuries that derived from its production in the *hic et nunc*. The technological production of mass art, and the specific impact it makes on the attitude of viewers, destroys this auratic quality. Benjamin's argument is notoriously not set in a negative key. On the contrary, in the framework of historical materialism, he sees in this epochal passage the possibility of redemption for the masses. Through a modification of the production and property relations between the masses and art, the latter is politicised and the fascist aestheticisation of politics is opposed. In this case, we return to a notion of the end of art where art is conceived in a comprehensive sense. The loss of aura concerns above all the performative and experiential aspects of the artwork, its visual and acoustic features, so the references to literature concern here more the aspects of the staging and acting of theatrical texts. Significant in this sense is the discussion by Benjamin of the pessimistic reflections present in Pirandello's novel *Si Gira...* (Benjamin 2008, 366/31), where it emerges how the identification process of the actor with her character on the theatre stage is destroyed by the decomposition of the act of performing by means of cinematographic editing. This rupture of the aura of the performance is seen by Benjamin as an increase in the awareness and the ability to assess of both the actor and the audience. In the breaking of the stage illusion, they can realise their collective attitude of participating in art, increasing their critical capacity. In this sense—as will be seen also in other texts of Benjamin's such as *The Author as Producer* or his studies on Brecht—the no longer auratic art of mass society expresses its potentially progressive and revolutionary character. The non-auratic aspect of literary art is just a part of the more general aspect of art in modern times, which here is understood in a way we could say is 'transgeneric'.

Adorno also intercepts the question of the end of art by taking art as a whole. In his thought, the resumption of the discourse on the end of art is particularly complex and, in part, contradictory, oscillating between 'a

present in an auratic age that has come to its end (Benjamin 2008, 368–369n10/48n23). For a comparison between Benjamin's and Hegel's positions, see Ophälders (2015). For an in-depth reconstruction of Benjamin's version of the end of art, see also Paetzoldt and Westphal (1977).

good, utopian end and the false demise of art; between the ideal of a reconciled society that no longer has need of art and the distorted reality of a society that in eliminating art has banished the last trace of the individual' (Geulen 2002, 117/90). In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argues that when, in secularised modernity, art reached autonomy losing the cultural function it had previously, its 'place [...] became uncertain' (Adorno 1970, 9/1). Without a transcendent side and transforming itself into a thing among things, art experiences a process of *Entkunstung* (translated as 'de-aestheticization' or, more philologically, 'de-artification'), which leads, on the one hand, to deny itself in its own concept, for example with the avant-gardes, and, on the other, to become an integrated part of the capitalist production system, therefore a commodity, something consolatory and in itself alienating.³³ In this way, art loses its essential critical dimension and produces only an obedient acceptance of the existing and its consolidation. The risk of art in modernity is that of exchanging the awareness of the impossibility of being the bearer of truth in its totality with the renunciation of its relationship to life, its task of critiquing and intervening in the world, which belongs to it in a fundamental way. In other words, art risks becoming a victim of the logic of the culture industry, that is, a victim of the mechanism proper to capitalist mass society which, through homogenisation, converts artworks into 'culinary' products, i.e. into consumer goods that are easy to access and enjoy without any contextual sensitivity to the world in which they are unconsciously integrated.³⁴

This is also the theoretical framework of the widely discussed statement—which is definitely part of the discourse on the end of literature—according to which it is barbaric to continue to write poetry after Auschwitz, present at the end of the 1951 essay *Cultural Criticism and Society* (Adorno 1977, 30/34) and taken further in the text *Commitment*. In this last text, which is a transcript of a 1962 radio conference on *engagé* literature, Adorno takes up the statement and, adopting the position of Enzensberger's reply to his earlier words, explains that its meaning consisted in the fact that 'literature must resist precisely this verdict, that

³³For an in-depth analysis of the concept of *Entkunstung* as part of a discourse on the end of art, see García Düttmann (2000, especially 107–128).

³⁴On Adorno's version of the end of art (with an interesting comparison with Danto), see also Goehr (2008, 97–106). A discussion of his version with regard to Hegel's is in Bozzetti (2015).

is, be such that it does not surrender to cynicism merely by existing after Auschwitz' (Adorno 1974, 423/87–88). Literature and art in general must therefore live up to the verdict, not accepting the established order that has produced the absolute horror of recent history, but instead developing a constant criticism of society. In this sense, the literary examples on which Adorno's attention is most focused are those of literary phenomena such as Kafka or Beckett, which, through linguistic experimentation, are able to generate shocks and moments of estrangement, capable of showing the possibility of a world different from the existing one.³⁵

This brief overview of the thinking of the three philosophers who in Geulen's text constitutes the most significant prosecutors of the discourse on the end of art after Hegel in the German context serves here, as with Nietzsche, to point out how the discourse on the end of literature in the twentieth century has its continuation, in the first place, within positions that address the end of art in general. In these cases, literature emerges as a peculiar artistic form and often plays an important role, but the discourse that is proposed on it is mainly bound to the preordained conceptual framework of the end of art.

In the twentieth century, however, there develops a discourse on the end that is set primarily with regard to literature. Especially in the second half of the century, there was an intensification in interventions that focused specifically on literature. Probably also encouraged by the increasingly pronounced disciplinary specialism, the discourse on the end of literature emerges strongly, showing the peculiarity of this specific art form.

A particularly significant case is that of the writer, literary critic and philosopher Maurice Blanchot, who addresses the problem of the end more directly in relation to literature. His example is noteworthy because he proposes a vision of the end of literature whose framework is predominantly philosophical; he does not deviate too much from the approach

³⁵Mario Farina has recently shown how the literary and linguistic aspect of Adorno's aesthetic theory is particularly relevant, arguing that the end of art, in terms of a dissolution of the aesthetic element, finds its possible reconstruction within the non-objective phenomenon of literature (Farina 2018). See also Geulen's hypothesis of a latent philosophy of language in Adorno in his consideration of art and aesthetic experience, which leads him to hypostatize, more than other authors, the discourse on its end and, with it, to overestimate art (Geulen 2002, 119/92).

of authors such as Nietzsche or Adorno, but unlike these he focuses his analysis, ultimately, on literature.

In works such as *The Space of Literature* (1955) and *The Book to Come* (1959), Blanchot tackles the question of the fate of literature, addressing the issue of its survival in modern times. The lenses through which he looks at this problem are always those of the general discourse on the end of art, but this time literature becomes almost the complete protagonist of the reasoning. Moreover, from his earliest writings his thought polemically confronts Hegel (George 2006) and in his analysis of the end of literature Hegel's conceptual apparatus returns in an organic and constitutive manner. His case can be understood as one of the possible versions of the long discourse on the end of literature that finds its origin directly in Hegel.

For Blanchot, art history has reached an epochal turning point because art 'is no longer capable of supporting the need for the absolute' (Blanchot 2016, 265/195). In Hegel's words, art has become for us 'a thing of the past', in the sense that it is no longer able to have a connection to the divine, to catalyse as an aggregating centre the world around it, to give the world its deepest meaning, as it did, for example, with the theatre of classical Greece. The divine has given way to history and art seems to be unable to have a comprehensive grip on its surrounding: '[r]elegated within us, it has lost its reality and its necessity; everything that was authentically true and alive in it now belongs to the world and to real, purposeful activity in the world' (Blanchot 2018, 284/214). The absolute is no longer at home in the art of modernity. The art that manifested the absolute is now consigned to the past and can only be found in museums, whereas what 'counts absolutely is henceforth accomplishment in the world, the seriousness of action, and the task of actual freedom' (Blanchot 2016, 265/195), which is what Hegel would call the 'prose of the world'.

In abandoning the dimension of the absolute, which supported it in its richness and vitality, literature seems to turn to everyday life: 'the poet yields to the belletrist and he to the chronicler of the day-to-day' (Blanchot 2018, 292/220).³⁶ Literature appears disoriented and the world, with its

³⁶Blanchot continues, writing in addition just below: '[c]risis and criticism seem to come from the world, from political and social reality, and seem to submit literature to a judgment that humiliates it in the name of history: it is history that criticizes literature and that pushes the poet aside, replacing the poet with the publicist, whose task is at the service of current events' (Blanchot 2016, 268/197).

common language, which is instrumental and immediate, seems to engulf it. Instead of literary artworks intended as bearers of the highest meaning, Blanchot seems to find a multiplicity of ordinary textual forms, certainly not philosophical and perhaps not even literary:

we are irritated at seeing literary works replaced by an always greater mass of texts that, under the name of documents or reports, terms that are almost coarse, seem to ignore any literary intention. They seem to say: we have nothing to do with creating things of art; they also seem to say: accounts of a false realism. What do we know of them? What do we know of this approach, even failed, toward a region that escapes the grasp of ordinary culture? (Blanchot 2016, 271/199)

It is a literature that risk becoming and admittedly become history, fact and testimony of the world in which it exists. In this situation, literature is confused with ordinary experience and ordinary experience—documents, reports—is confused with literature, in an open and intrinsically problematic concept of what literature is.

Furthermore, the preponderance of the external and ordinary world is accompanied by the exaltation of the creative subjectivity of the writer. In prosaic modernity, the writer participates in a process of secularisation, in which she thinks that she ‘takes the place left vacant by the absence of the gods’ (Blanchot 2018, 290/219). The rise of subjectivity is certainly an effect of the loss of sacredness of literature, of something that concerns the literary artwork in modernity. Nonetheless, the fact that the writer thinks of herself as an absolute creator equal to a god is only a ‘strangely deceptive ambition’, an ‘illusion’ (Blanchot 2018, 290/219). In becoming a creator, the writer merely borrows from the divinity and takes upon herself the burden of creation. In doing so, she assumes the least divine attribute that the god possesses, namely that of work and fatigue. In her absolute modern and egocentric self-reference, what in the end the artist who thinks she is a god manages to represent is only herself as a simple and worldly human being (‘At this stage, art is what we call humanistic’, Blanchot 2018, 289/218).

However, not everything is lost. And this is clear in the analysis of Mallarmé, who, with his ‘Hegelian vocabulary’ (Blanchot 2018, 137/109), also

takes on the problematic of the end of literature in its Hegelian form. The poet is looking for an essential language that does not correspond to that of the everyday world, 'the crude word' (Blanchot 2018, 38–39/38–39) and, on the contrary, contrasts with it as an inessential language that everyone speaks to each other without really saying anything. For a moment, Blanchot says, one is led to think that this essential language corresponds to the 'language of thought' as it implicitly posits the Hegelian alternative mentioned above between 'ordinariness' and 'philosophisation'. However, this language of thought—a 'silent movement which affirms in man his decision not to be, to separate himself from being, and, by making this separation real, to build the world'—is nothing more than another illusion, another way in which the word sends us back to the world, bringing with it an instrumental dimension that implies either a task to do or a firm condition in which we delude ourselves that we are safe (Blanchot 2018, 40/41).

Between the two extremes, Mallarmé still chooses the path of literature. No longer being able to bear the absolute in itself and without opting for the path of philosophy, literature turns to itself and participates in a self-reflexive process that brings it to the core of its essence. In a sense, this process consumes literature and brings it closer to its end: 'literature is going toward itself, toward its essence, which is disappearance' (Blanchot 2016, 265/195). It is a contradictory and in some ways elusive fate, which describes the power and ability of literature to withstand the repercussions of modernity. The literary space is a hidden, foreign and negative space, which is impossible to define and is never present. In this elusiveness is shown all the peculiarity of this artistic form: 'the essence of literature is precisely to escape any essential determination, any assertion that stabilises it or even realises it: it is never already there, it always has to be rediscovered or reinvented [...] finally, it is non-literature' (Blanchot 2016, 273/201). In these circumstances, the poet places herself at the centre of an enigma. She doesn't do it with a willingness to dominate the world as if she were a god, but losing herself in this condition, tries to face a situation which imposes itself as open and boundless.³⁷

³⁷Cf. Collin (1971) and Hillyer (2013).

It is precisely this openness that indicates the possibility of literature surviving its end. It is an opening that leaves room for the ability to explore and continually reformulate the literary space. This is a kind of reinventing power that literature has in itself. Through the means proper to this form of art, Mallarmé identifies multiple solutions for the crisis of literature, from abandoning himself to the absence and attempting to make the absence possible in the story *Igitur* (Blanchot 2018, 135–150/108–119) to reformulating the literary space through the unusual typographic arrangement that reflects the content of the poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (Blanchot 2016, 318–319/234).³⁸ In Blanchot's analysis, he deepens the potential of text and writing, indicating the way for the future of literature and the book itself, in terms which will echo in subsequent theoretical developments, for instance, in an author like Derrida.³⁹ In so doing, he affirms the possibility for literature to emerge from its crisis, showing how, in its very end, it can find further ways to renew itself and be reborn.

Blanchot's perspective is just a further example of that long discourse on the end of art and literature that has crossed the entire philosophical culture of modernity and that I have tried to outline in broad terms, mentioning some of its most significant examples. In Blanchot's case, however, the discourse on the end, starting with a general view on art, specialises and becomes discourse explicitly on the end of literature. This specific discourse, emerging with force in the last decades of the twentieth century and continuing until today, has been radicalised, bringing the end of literature to the centre of a large number of studies and interventions, which have taken shape in different ways and in various scientific perspectives and national traditions. To refer only to the 1990s, they range from

³⁸Referring to this last composition and to Mallarmé's ability to interpret modernity, Benjamin in *One-Way Street* writes: '[n]ow everything indicates that the book in this traditional form is nearing its end. Mallarmé, who in the crystalline structure of his manifestly traditionalist writing saw the true images of what was to come, was in the *Coup de dés*, the first to incorporate the graphic tension of the advertisement in the printed page' (Benjamin 1991a, 102/456).

³⁹Derrida's theory of the end of the book and the beginning through the écriture, understood as a trace of an absent voice coming from a distant tradition, which is at the beginning of *Grammatology*, has notoriously several similarities with Blanchot's approach. For an introduction to the textual issue in Derrida, see Ferraris (1986, especially 33–79). On the overcoming of the book in Blanchot, see also Zuccarino (2017).

a comprehensive analysis of literature's many features—from university teaching to the relationship with new technologies—by Alvin Kernan in his *The Death of Literature* (Kernan 1990) to the survey of the places of the topos on the end of literature in *Addio. Abschied von der Literatur* by Reinhard Baumgart (Baumgart 1995) to the more philosophical perspective of Jacques Rancière in 1998 with *La parole muette. Essai sur les contradictions de la littérature* (Rancière 2010). This discourse has, in the French context especially, developed with particular intensity in recent years, with different accents and often provoked by an internal reasoning on the state of culture in society in the particular national context, for instance: Dominique Maingueneau's analysis of contemporary literature starting with Proust's *Contre Saint-Beuve* (Maingueneau 2006), Richard Millet or Tzvetan Todorov interventions closer to the pamphlet (Millet 2007; Todorov 2007), Dominique Viart and Laurent Demanze impressively edited volumes (Viart and Demanze 2011, 2012), and the very recent essay by Johan Faerber on the state of contemporary literature after its end (Faerber 2018).

In all these cases, the general discourse on the end of art is left completely in the background and with it the philosophical tradition that produced it. In some cases, an overall reasoning on art is not really addressed and literature is the only protagonist of a discourse that takes place in complete autonomy. Very often the Hegelian origin is not taken into account or is assimilated into more recent positions that have reworked the thesis on the end. This shows a peculiarity of literature with regard to the issue of its own end that, for the quantity of interventions and quality of the reflection of the reasoning produced, does not seem to be found for other kinds of art.

In the rich and wide-ranging debate of recent years, two of the most significant and influential contributions were those of the theorists and historians of literature William Marx and Giulio Ferroni. The first published a volume in 2005 titled *L'Adieu à la littérature. Histoire d'une dévalorisation XVIII^e-XX^e siècle* [A Farewell to Literature. History of a Devaluation from the eighteenth to the twentieth century], where he analyses the end of literature in modernity through an especially historical-literary perspective. Marx proposes a 'Heraclitean history' (Marx 2005, 13) of literature,

that is, a discourse on the end that considers literature as an object in continuous movement, whose definition and features constantly change, in a succession of states that exclude an eternalist vision of it.

Marx starts from a general assessment of the contemporary situation in which he detects all the signs of a 'weakening' and a 'loss of prestige' of the literary art form in favour of other expressive languages, first of all cinema (Marx 2005, 11). His idea is to consider the current state of literature as the point of arrival of a long-term phenomenon and his goal is to investigate the genealogy and the reasons behind it:

But rather than focusing on the description of a contemporary disease of which no one doubts, we propose here to take a step back and find the root causes of this decline in influence, which results from a long-term evolution. The thesis is simple: between the 18th and 20th centuries there was a radical transformation of literature in Europe; its form, its idea, its function, its mission, everything was changed. (Marx 2005, 12)

According to Marx, from the nineteenth century onwards, literature continued to stage its own end and, between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, it underwent a radical transformation passing through several phases which he tries to reconstruct. The 'farewell to literature' began between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with intense theoretical activity focused on the concept of the 'sublime'. This started with Boileau's 1674 translation of Pseudo-Longinus's *Treaty* and continued throughout the following century. The centrality of literary art progressively increased and provoked an 'expansion' of the importance and position of literature to the point where it began to assume the character of a sort 'religion' with its own theology (identified in Hegel's philosophy of art) and of which 'the writers were the high priests and the critics the guardians of the temple' (Marx 2005, 54).

This strengthening role of literature, however, subsequently degenerated during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. Literature gave the impression that it could be sufficient for itself, that it could manifest and express itself independently of the social context that had given it preponderance and, in this sense, that it could mark a separation between art and life. The growing importance of

autonomy and form in theoretical reflections on art—in which ‘literature constituted it into a world of its own, detaching it from the contingencies of reality’ (Marx 2005, 73), or ‘art for art’s sake’, in short—came at the cost of making music, and not literature, the paradigmatic art: instead of contributing to the consolidation of literature’s value, this autonomisation of art opened the way for its devaluation.

Marx argues that literature has progressively lost the ability and credibility to relate to and represent reality and the surrounding world in general. He chooses to show this deterioration in the relationship between literature and life, analysing the different relationship that literature first had to the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 and then to the catastrophe of the Shoah. If in the first case the relationship between language and the world was not yet broken and literature was still able to recount the disaster, in the second case—the author analyses the verdict of Adorno and the complex relationship of Celan’s poetry with the experience of the Shoah—literature comes to terms with the inadequacy and limitations of its condition in voicing reality: in a few centuries, we move from a ‘poetry of disaster’ (*poésie du désastre*) to the ‘disaster of poetry’ (*désastre de la poésie*).

In the second half of the twentieth century, the symptoms of the crisis of literature multiplied and deepened, radicalising the loss of grip on reality and turning into a ‘collective suicide’ that concerns the possibilities and limits of writing, the social figure of the writer and the capacities of criticism. In this way, literature has completed its journey: it expands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, autonomises in the nineteenth century and diminishes in value in contemporary times. This, however, does not mean that Marx sentences literature to a definitive end; rather, precisely on account of his historical, ‘Heraclitean’ approach, he leaves possibilities open and sees signs of a return of literature to the world in phenomena such as the autofiction novel or cultural studies (Marx 2005, 169). Marx’s analysis—richer in characters and episodes than this brief summary—describes, with a strongly historical and suitably theoretical approach, the path of a literature that has gone through its end, but which has in itself all the possibilities to resist its decline and reinvent itself in new ways. In this case, although it intercepts (but does not coincide with)

the pathway of the wider artistic phenomenon, the literary phenomenon is treated in itself and rather independently from the Hegelian matrix.⁴⁰

Another overall and particularly stimulating approach to a 'final' dimension of literature is that of the historian and critic of literature Giulio Ferroni in his *Dopo la fine. Una letteratura possibile* [*After the end. A possible literature*], published for the first time in 1996 and in a second edition in 2010. His examination also opens with an all-embracing perception of contemporary cultural life. Ferroni highlights a saturation effect caused by the technological-media advancement and the quantitative expansion of communicative production. For Ferroni, the occurrence of the 'end' corresponds to an 'invasion of too much' (Ferroni 2010a, XVIII) towards which it is necessary to strive to find ways that make it possible to create differences, maps and orientations in the indistinct proliferation of information. As to facing the climate crisis, it is necessary to put in place rational strategies that are able to slow down the immoderate and aggressive intervention of human beings, so Ferroni hopes for the rise of an attitude that he calls 'ecological' within the cultural world and, specifically, the world of literature.⁴¹

Ferroni's reflection goes much deeper than a simple contextual analysis of the present. He reconstructs the revolutions and transformations that, especially in the contemporary world, have upset the arts in general. The technological innovations and socio-political upheavals that have occurred since the nineteenth century have in fact produced 'a halt and a fracture in the development and continuity of the language of the arts' (Ferroni 2010a, 116–117), a process that has only become visible at the turn of the second millennium. On the one hand, these changes have led to the exhaustion of some expressive paths, to their identification as phenomena stretching between a beginning and an end, and to the implementation of the mechanisms and institutions of their conservation, cataloguing and archiving. On the other hand, the series of expressive 'dérèglements', elaborated above all by the twentieth-century avant-gardes, has produced

⁴⁰In Marx's discourse, Hegel, although present (e.g. Marx 2005, 168), is not particularly central. In a more recent article, however, precisely about the proposed philosophical-historical articulation of expansion-autonomisation-decadence, Marx describes his essay as 'a Hegelian-inspired reading of the history of literature over the past two centuries' (Marx 2012, 32).

⁴¹See also Ferroni (2010b).

a 'mass deregulation' that involves the whole society of culture (Ferroni 2010a, 114).

As to a tradition on the end of literature, perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of Ferroni's argument is his emphasis on the peculiarity of literature in this process. Figurative arts were the first to incorporate this epochal change. They express with utmost clarity the advent of an 'after', which was determined, first of all, by competition with the imitation of the world produced by the technological inventions of photography and then cinema. Ferroni makes a similar claim for music too, which manifests in different ways its being in a final phase and in a state of 'closure': from the categorisation of the experience of the past as 'classical music' to the constitution of a definitive repertoire for the opera, preserved by its institutions (orchestras, conductors, singers) and the recording industries, up to the experience of musical genres including, among others, the classical musical and jazz of the golden years. Having completed their pathway and placing themselves as closed genres, they find their specific admirers (Ferroni 2010a, 119–121). Even a totally contemporary art form like cinema seems to experience a sense of ending, and not only with regard to silent or black-and-white films: the technological evolution of representational means, which marks a progress in special effects and in the possibilities of virtuality, puts for some critics the essence of cinematic art in jeopardy and brings it closer to a final stage (Ferroni 2010a, 121–122).

Compared to the case of the other arts, literature seems to take a completely different position. If the other arts have reached a state of closure and end due to contextual and especially material factors, literature seems to experience its own end in a specific way and to find in itself the possibility of overcoming it:

In principle, literature may seem much less exposed than other cultural forms to the risk of a 'closure' of its own language: it is not forced to resort to particular techniques, which must occupy a physical space; beyond all the supports of writing that it can use, its only truly indispensable tool is constituted by an entirely immaterial entity such as the natural language. Its fate is certainly different from that of painting, sculpture, cinema, and even from that of music (which in any case needs the physicality of sound): and one can think that, however things go, in whatever way the supports

of writing are transformed, the rootedness of literature in the basic linguistic system (the original tool and until now essential for communication between human beings) guarantees it an almost unlimited possibility to stay alive and reincarnate. (Ferroni 2010a, 124–125)

Ferroni marks a line of demarcation between literature and other arts. His reasoning here focuses on material supports. Whatever the means by which we read the texts, according to Ferroni, this will not change the nature of the text, as has happened with the other arts. A book, after all, remains a book and the language of the literary artwork, so essential for human communication in general, is a guarantee of the survival of literature in its future reformulations.⁴² Precisely because the linguistic and written dimension of literature comes from the linguistic dimension that has always been inherent and innate to the human being, it places literature in a sort of essential condition that determines it as a ‘posthumous’ condition since forever. Literature has always been involved in an ‘after’ itself, it has always been involved in its end: ‘the writing is always beyond, outside the vital substance; however, it is placed “after” the manifestation of the truth and the memory that aspired to be transfused into it, and so it takes them away from itself, imprisons and kills them in the letter, transposes them into signs of death’ (Ferroni 2010a, 4).

In addition to an almost sociological evaluation of the cultural context, Ferroni’s analysis runs along a line that finds its strongest philosophical references in Benjamin’s and Adorno’s thoughts (he rarely mentions Hegel). He concentrates above all on the function of technological evolutions and brings the discourse to a material level that is configured above all in terms of the loss of the ‘aura’ of artistic expressions and consequent obsolescence and closure of the forms of art at a social level. In this context, literature is in a very unique position that takes it even beyond its time, since the linguistic medium that produces it essentially saves it from the risks of closure and obsolescence.

⁴²In addition to the positions presented, the views of those who, with the emergence of new technologies, discuss the end of the book as a material support should be added to an overview of the end of the literature. For a discussion on these issues and a passionate defense of the book as an object that will survive for centuries, see Eco and Carrière (2009).

Marx's and Ferroni's volumes represent different approaches to the same issue. They tackle the phenomenon of literature mostly as such and, in some cases, in contrast to the development of the other arts. Their books are two of the most significant examples in recent years of a debate on literature that, finding its roots in the nineteenth century, enters the twentieth century within the general framework of the discussion on the end of art and becomes, especially in recent years, autonomous, demonstrating the specificity of literature in comparison with the rest of the art forms.

Frank Kermode has shown (Kermode 2000) that the apocalyptic paradigm, according to which the world is organised in terms of a beginning, middle and an end, influences the way in which literary artworks are conceived and structured; at the same time, this paradigm has been influenced, in its historical manifestations, by literary writing and the modalities of producing fiction. Partly revising Kermode's view, one could say that an apocalyptic paradigm or, in a less demanding way, a paradigm of the end has not only affected literature in its contents, forms and ways of expression, but also in its philosophical-historical conception and in the discourse about it over at least the last two hundred years.

Within this discourse—which was already the specification of a more general one—one can find a further specification, a further discourse, here again partly integrated and partly autonomous from the discourse on the end of literature, i.e. the discourse on the end of the novel.

4 The End of the Novel

'I believe that the genre of the novel, if it is not irremediably exhausted, is certainly in its final period' complained Ortega y Gasset in his 1925 essay *Ideas sobre la novela*, referring to the realistic novel and the exhaustion of topics that were able to satisfy the modern reader (Ortega y Gasset 2005, 881). In his 1926 review of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Thomas Sterne Eliot sentenced: the 'novel ended with Flaubert and with James'. In his extraordinary manipulation of the myth through continuous parallels between past and present, Joyce would have inaugurated—according to Eliot—a new method that decreed the end of an artistic form of the past. In fact, Joyce and Wyndham Lewis—who is likened by Eliot for a moment to the

Irish writer—would no longer write novels after the respective *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Tarr* because they, ‘being “in advance” of their time, felt a conscious or probably unconscious dissatisfaction with the form, that their novels are more formless than those of a dozen clever writers who are unaware of its obsolescence’ (Eliot 1975, 177). And in 1930 Benjamin tackled the issue of the crisis of the novel and spoke of Alfred Döblin who, ‘far from resigning himself to this crisis, hurries on ahead of it and makes its cause his own’, and who, with his *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, proposes a work that, through the technique of montage rethinks the form of the novel and ‘explodes the framework of the novel, bursts its limits both stylistically and structurally, and clears the way for new, epic possibilities’ (Benjamin 1991b, 231–232/300–301).

These are just a few examples that describe the presence of a discourse on the end of the novel in the first half of the twentieth century, an era marked by experimentalism in the literary field of the avant-garde and the affirmation of the modernist novel. These statements describe the exhaustion of a previous form and overshadow the emergence of a new form: a profound and significant change, but definitely neither a complete halt of this genre, nor a conclusive transformation. This discourse on the end concerns a specific genre that, in a retrospective perspective, is inserted in the two broader discourses on the end of art and on the end of literature, but that unfolds, in its references and in its modes of expression, as an autonomous discourse in its own right. It is a discourse that makes the novel a genre that comes to its end as an epiphenomenon representative of the general end of literature, but at the same time radicalises the latter in a specific sense. Responding to the great cultural and social upheavals of the time, in fact, the novel tries to free itself from its great eighteenth and nineteenth centuries form. It experiences an end, which leads it to become something else by itself, but remaining however itself. It is a further discourse on the end, which is always and in any case a new beginning, characterised by the problems and contradictions that this genre has always had in itself and that continue to shape it.

The debate on the end of the novel, then, continues in the second half of the twentieth century, crossing different latitudes and cultural contexts far from each other. Resuming the overview: Alain Robbe-Grillet’s proposed a *Nouveau Roman* that embodied a new gaze, meticulous and photographic,

in contrast with the psychologism of the traditional novel that ‘has fallen into such a state of stagnation – a lassitude acknowledged and discussed by the whole of critical opinion – that it is hard to imagine such an art can survive for long’ (Robbe-Grillet 1963, 16/17). Although he doesn’t want to talk about the ‘death of the novel’, Tom Wolfe pointed out that this genre ‘no longer has the supreme status it enjoyed for ninety years (1875-1965)’ and the *New Journalism*, taking on some attitudes and modalities of social realism, was emerging as a new artistic form (Wolfe 1975, 50). John Barth observed that ‘it may well be that the novel’s time as a major art form is up, as the “times” of classical tragedy, Italian and German grand opera, or the sonnet-sequence came to be’ (Barth 1984, 71). He saw promise instead, especially through the analysis of Borges’ work, in a kind of reflective literature that would merge into postmodern experimentalism. Finally, we get to the struggle of the *Gruppo 63* for a new avant-garde novel to be raised on the ashes of the bourgeois novel and to replace a genre that was at that time for them lifeless (Balestrini et al. 2013). In these cases, too, the novel seems to be a restless artistic-literary phenomenon, something that, in order to assert itself as such, in order to survive, must ponder the question of its end, must produce, to remain itself, the discourse of its radical transformation. In these terms, the discourse on the end of the novel seems to take up the features of the discourse on the end of literature in a more profound and extreme way.

This radicalisation continues and reaches up to the present day in statements such as those of David Foster Wallace who, in his essay on John Updike in 1998, notes, at the approach of the end of the millennium, the ‘online predictions of the death of the novel as we know it’ (Wallace 2006b, 51) or like the recent observations of Philip Roth in an interview (ironically, video) on the difficulty of the novel to survive the power of the screen and his pessimistic prediction that it will become cultic, read by very few people, ‘maybe more people than now read Latin poetry, but somewhere in that range’ (Roth 2009). This discourse, especially concerning the comparison between the novel and the dizzying expansion of new information technologies, continues to be present in the public and is not merely a specialised debate in newspapers and the web (Self 2014; McCarthy 2015; Lagioia 2016; Pollen 2019) and in a novel like the recent

Kudos by Rachel Cusk, where there are numerous reflections on the power of the novel today and its fate (Cusk 2018).⁴³

These are just some of the almost infinite possible examples that in the twentieth century have decreed the end or even death of the novel. In parallel to the more general discourse on the end of literature and the even broader discourse on the end of art, a specific discourse—but equally powerful and varied in the multiplicity of voices that expresses it—has developed, often independently of the other two. Perhaps even more so than for the ends of art and literature, the perspectives that have followed this path and have contributed to the creation of this *topos* are different, ranging from the most careful literary criticism to the most profound philosophical reflection, from the theory of the most technical literature to the considerations of writers on their own work, and breaking through the academic and technical field into the public opinion of the cultural pages of newspapers. And as with the other two ends, the meaning attributed to the end of the novel is multiple: there are those who focus on the formal revolution of a specific work as in the case of Eliot on Joyce's *Ulysses* or Benjamin on Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*; those who decree the exhaustion of a literary experience to oppose a new way of conceiving the novel as in the cases of the *Nouveau Roman*, of Barth's postmodernist reflections, of the *New Journalism* and of the new novel of *Gruppo 63*; and there are those who fear the incompatibility of the genre of the novel with modern times and technological innovations, as Ortega y Gasset did at the beginning of the nineteenth century and Roth at the beginning of the twenty-first.

Again, what this end describes in general is a profound change. And even in this case—except for the most pessimistic views—it is, in most of the examples proposed, a simulated end, an end that intends to reaffirm the need for the genre within literary, artistic, cultural times of great transformations. It is an end that means a new beginning, a new way for the novel to face and survive its own end.

⁴³For example, the character Faye—the narrator and Cusk's alter ego—remarks: '[i]n England, I said, people liked to live in old houses that had been thoroughly refurbished with modern conveniences, and I wondered whether the same principle might be applied to novels; and if so, whether the blunting or loss of our own instinct for beauty was responsible for it' (Cusk 2018, 37).

More than what happened to art in general—think above all of the figurative arts—and in accordance with the difference of literature's end, this great change has not led to a total and definitive transformation of the genre of the novel, but to its continuous reformulation, sometimes even radical, but always remaining within the scope and dynamics of its conception, dressing it with new contents and forms. This vitality is perhaps the very essence of the genre.

In this context, the paradox of the end of the novel arises. This genre—as we will see in the next chapter with the description of the novel as the 'modern epic' in Hegel—represents one of the key genres of modernity, perhaps *the* genre of modernity, which expresses modernity and in which modernity recognises itself. In this sense, the discourse on the end of the novel tells the story of the contradiction of an era that has as its founding and, at the same time, conflicting feature the continual rethinking of itself. Modernity reaffirms itself continuously in and through the novel, even when it goes beyond itself and describes itself, for instance, as post-modernity. The novel, on its part, represents the persistence of this end and the affirmation of the need for a perpetually new beginning in an unrelenting sequence of deaths and successive rebirths. More than what happens with other literary genres, it shows how literature has in itself the germs of its end and how, in modernity, this character of end that innervates it comes out in all its paradoxical power. And it is precisely the founding relationship between novel and modernity that is a core feature in one of the most significant reflections carried out in recent decades on the end of this literary genre that of the novelist Milan Kundera.

Kundera attributes to the novel a specific function in the constitution of modernity and a fundamental role in the formation of European culture, framing his arguments from a historical and philosophical perspective. His analysis starts from a correction of Husserl's and Heidegger's reconstruction of 'the forgetting of being' towards which the progress of technology at the expense of life, of the *Lebenswelt*, leads the world. They identify the origin of Europe's crisis—'that extends beyond geographical Europe (to America, for instance) and that was born with ancient Greek philosophy' (Kundera 1986, 13/1)—with the beginning of modernity, with Descartes and Galilei. It consists in the transformation of the world into an object of technical-mathematical investigation and in the mutation of

the image of the human being, who had produced this change, and of his concrete life into an object at the mercy of technology, politics and history. What, according to Kundera, Husserl and Heidegger didn't consider in their analysis is that at the basis of modernity there is not only Descartes and Galilei, but also Cervantes. This integration is particularly relevant because, if philosophy and science gradually forgot being, the history of the novel was precisely the story of the exploration of this forgetfulness: 'all the great existential themes Heidegger analyses in *Being and Time*—considering them to have been neglected by all earlier European philosophy—had been unveiled, displayed, illuminated by four centuries of the novel' (Kundera 2005, 15/5). The history of modernity is constituted by scientific and philosophical progress, but also by the work of the novel, which compensates for what science and philosophy have gradually forgotten to pose as a problem of thought.

Kundera, in his fascinating analysis, assigns to the novel a purely cognitive function. It is a function that, in 'its own way, through its own logic' (Kundera 2005, 15/5), it has carried on for centuries, unfolding a story that is a '*sequence of discoveries* (not the sum of what was written)' (Kundera 2005, 16/6). Modern times are born, for Kundera, when the only divine truth of the ancients has shattered into a multiplicity of relative truths and the novel represents that human expression that is proper to them. Cervantes opened the way to the investigation of the infinity of aspects of concrete life, revealing the world behind the myths and legends of antiquity: '[a] magic curtain, woven of legends, hung before the world. Cervantes sent Don Quixote journeying and tore through the curtain. The world opened before the knight errant in all the comical nakedness of its prose' (Kundera 2005, 110/92).

What Don Quixote explores is the 'world of prose', says Kundera in an almost Hegelian language—a world that is made of concreteness, the commonplace and life (Kundera 2005, 21/8). Its contradictions never refer to a single solution and reason is not only on Anna's or Karenin's side (Kundera 2005, 30/18). It is a world in which truth is complex, almost elusive, and whose knowledge requires wisdom (Kundera 2005, 30/18). However, what is needed is a wisdom of a specific kind, a kind that only the novel can, with its own means, produce: the '*wisdom of uncertainty*' (Kundera 2005, 17/7). The novel articulates this wisdom through four

‘appeals’ that Kundera lists as its way of exploring, with inexhaustible power, the complexity of the world: the appeal of play, represented by the lightness—never equalled again and partly limited by the successive concerns of realism—of Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* and Diderot’s *Jacques le Fatalist*; the appeal of dream, in which the full imaginative potential of the novel is expressed as an encounter between fantasy and reality, powerfully exemplified by Kafka; the appeal of thought, that is the great capacity of human understanding, which, without transforming literature into philosophy, the novel has in itself and which Kundera finds in authors such as Musil or Broch; and the appeal for time, namely the possibility of the novel not only to limit itself to personal memory as for instance in Proust, but to extend it to that of a collective time, as Aragon and Fuentes have done (Kundera 2005, 26–28/15–17). Through these four ‘appeals’, namely through the ways that Kundera identifies, the novel opens up to endless possibilities that allow it to cross and embrace the intricacies of the concrete world in an understanding that is peculiar to it. Through them, the novel represents the specific cognitive way in which literature contributes to the foundation and advancement of the modern world.

In this context of a framework in which the novel is constitutively linked to modernity, Kundera poses the problem of its end. Again and again—notes the writer—there has been talked on the end of the novel and most of the time in a frivolous way (Kundera 2005, 24/13). In fact, the end of the novel would bring with it catastrophic consequences, which have nothing to do with a trivialisation of the discourse: ‘if Cervantes is the founder of the Modern Era, then the end of his legacy ought to signify more than a mere stage in the history of literary forms; it would herald the end of the Modern Era’ (Kundera 2005, 24–25/13). Kundera therefore conceives the end of the novel in absolutely radical terms and takes to the extreme the constitutive link between this genre and the era it contributed, in his interpretation, to producing. In this sense, the end of the novel is not ‘a fanciful idea’ (Kundera 2005, 26/15), but has already happened in all those historical contexts—Kundera has in mind above all his autobiographical experience and the Soviet Union—in which a totalitarian regime has imposed a unilateral truth that excludes a relativistic view, the perspective of doubt, the questioning of contradiction and the coexistence of different truths, which are constituent of the spirit of the novel. However,

Kundera's intuition does not only focus on the observation of historical events of the past or on the denunciation of specific political situations, but expands to the point of criticising consumer society and the predominance in it of mass media that produces a simplification, unification and homogenization of perspectives on the world—quite the opposite of the spirit of the novel. The 'novel's spirit is the spirit of complexity' (Kundera 2005, 30/18).

Kundera does not intend to propose prophetic predictions, but wants to affirm the fact that the spirit of the novel is even more necessary today: if the end of the novel can take place it is not because its propulsive force has ended, but because it is located in a world that is no longer its own; on the contrary, the survival of the novel is configured as a form of resistance and opposition to reductionist and homogenising tendencies that permeate contemporary society.

The end of the novel, therefore, is for Kundera the issue of the crisis of modernity as a possible renunciation of the most typical purposes of modernity, which the novel has contributed decisively to constituting. It is the issue of the contradictions of modernity and the inability to deal with them as a risk to the very survival of the spirit of modernity. The novel, in its own qualities and in those of literature in general, represents one of the most powerful solutions to transform this end into a new beginning, to transform the end of modernity, which is also its own end, into a proper renewal.

To summarise the path taken so far, this has been the story of three ends. Better: the story of an end that has seen three different discourses on it, partly coinciding and partly independent from each other. A general discourse on the end of art, one more specific, but with a possible dependence on the first, on the end of literature, and one on the end of the novel, which stands as an appendix to the second, but expresses an essential and largely autonomous formulation of the second. All three discourses have their origin in that epochal passage for European and world culture that was the decades around 1800. All three have to do with the constitution of modernity and the development of its contradictions, which contributes to producing the three ends and which, in turn, finds expression in the three ends.

What I have tried to show is how the peculiarity of literature has produced a development of the discourse on the end of art that has also had its own life. It certainly shared the framework and the basic instances of the superordinated one, but expressed itself with a very peculiar specificity, to the point of producing an even more specific one—but not for this reason less central—like the one on the novel. In a historical-philosophical and historical-literary survey, which has necessarily been limited, I have tried to show how, even from a historical point of view, literature in modernity has faced its end in a specific way, within specific theoretical frameworks and in its own way. In short, I have tried to find in the last two centuries voices in support of the thesis that literature experiences its end in a different way than other genres of art, developing a discourse of its own.

Following in the footsteps of some of these examples, in the continuation of this book, I will therefore try to deepen the thesis of the peculiarity of literature in facing its own end, proposing a return to the origin of the reflection on this end, namely to Hegel. In an in-depth interpretation of his proposal, I will try to recover a theoretical framework that can explain the peculiar ways in which literature experiences its own end.

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4

Philosophisation and Ordinariness

After outlining the general ontological and historical specificity of the literary artwork with respect to the other arts and providing the context of the success of the thesis on the end of art applied to literature, in this chapter—the most technically ‘Hegelian’ chapter of the book—I draw from Hegel’s work interpretative elements that will be central to demonstrating the resistance of literature to Danto’s claim for the ‘transgenerical character’ of the thesis.

More specifically, in this chapter I propose, on the basis of the Hegelian conception, an interpretation of the end of art that will be useful for the reading of literary phenomenon. First of all, I will discuss the close link between the critical reception of Hegel’s philosophy of art and the plural field of its interpretations of the end-of-art thesis within the so-called *Hegel-Forschung*. Starting from a reflection on this multiplicity (Sect. 1), I will claim that such a variety is not only provoked by the critical debate as something external produced after the fact, but rather is also present in the Hegelian texts (Sect. 2.1). I will therefore concentrate on the case of literature and analyse the exceptional role that literature has within Hegel’s philosophy of art (Sect. 2.2). At that point, starting with Hegel, I will point out two possible dominant interpretations of the end of art, which will become the two interpretative poles for understanding the end of the

literary artwork, namely the reading of the end of art as ‘philosophisation’ (Sect. 3) and that of the end of art as ‘ordinariness’ (Sect. 4). I shall conclude this reading of the end-of-art thesis with a few provisional considerations about the constitutive coexistence of these two possible alternatives, of these two ends, in the literary phenomenon (Sect. 5). Since the perspective with which I analyse how literature faces its end focuses, in the next chapter, on the novel as a key genre in modernity—and the most evident expression of the peculiarity of literature with respect to its end—I conclude the chapter with a deepening of the relationship between Hegel and this literary genre (Sect. 6).

1 Rereading the End of Art

As we have seen, the so-called end-of-art thesis, over the course of numerous revivals and re-elaborations (even in fields that are not limited to the specialist research on Hegel), has aroused an endless debate concerning both its general version as it pertains to the overall notion of art and how it can be understood in relation to literature.

If it is true that the multiplicity of voices has brought this topic well beyond its Hegelian origin, it is also true that a real variety of readings can be found only by looking at the interpretations of the thesis in the work of Hegel himself. This is not only a question of particular academic schools or of the approaches taken by critics. Rather, it results from the fact that the Hegelian texts themselves—and not only the *Lectures on Aesthetics*—leave space for a slew of potential meanings.

In order to describe the general attitudes and expectations the interpreters place in the thesis, an important view has been proposed by Benjamin Rutter and, more recently, in a similar way by Julia Peters. Assuming, as has been done here many times before, that no one reads the thesis any longer as the actual end or, worse, death of artistic production, they question the ways in which the thesis has been interpreted in terms of a loss of the relevance of art within the cultural context and in society in general. They use a psychological description to exemplify outcomes in philosophical interpretations, distinguishing between ‘pessimistic’ and

‘optimistic’ readings of this loss. For the first group of commentators—and among them, we can find thinkers like Dieter Henrich or Arthur C. Danto—Hegel would have decreed the fact that art will have irreparably lost its effectiveness in society, even its *raison d’être*, and will instead give way to philosophy (or to the philosophy of art); for the second group, instead—which includes scholars such as Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, Stephen Houlgate or Robert B. Pippin—the peremptory nature of the loss of art’s status in modernity is mitigated by the ongoing indispensability and continued vitality of modern art, even though it bears a different function.¹

There are yet more details to consider. One of the most complex and articulated attempts to discuss the plural meaning of this thesis belongs to Stephen Bungay, who has divided the several interpretative proposals about the thesis and the future of art in modernity by Hegel into different groups: those who are critical of Hegel and have found in the thesis a ‘eulogy’ for art, ousted and definitively replaced by philosophy (in this group, Bungay brings back Croce, who decreed this ‘eulogy’ and he is probably the origin of the denomination of the end as ‘death’, Glockner, Litt, Wolandt, Bubner); the interpreters who find the Hegelian philosophical-artistic system—and with it also the thesis on the end of art—in its whole useless and try to recover some local insights or critical assessments of specific artists or artworks (Stoikov, Helferich, Harries, Rüsen, Oelmüller); those—and this is the largest and the most varied group—who see in the thesis an indication or a prediction of art’s future, referring to the development of art after Hegel’s death to corroborate his arguments (Bröcker, Gadamer, Heller, Henrich, Hofstadter, Jähnig, Kuhn, Patočka, Wagner, Wiehl); and lastly, readings like those of Reed and Pöggeler, who interpret the thesis by attending to the general philosophical-literary context of Hegel’s time.²

¹Cf. Rutter (2010, 6–64) and Peters (2015, 121–124).

²Especially as it concerns the largest group, Bungay provides a list of the interpretations of the thesis: ‘Bröcker – art is subjective. Gadamer – art is no longer a manifestation of the Divine, and has therefore become ‘Reflexionskunst’. Heller – the history of art shows it to be engaged in a ‘journey into the interior’. Modern art shows interiority. Henrich – there will be no future Utopia of art; it is reflective, free to use all historical forms, and it is partial. Hofstadter – art is to show up its own falsity by destroying beauty in the medium of beauty. Jähnig – art no longer reflects our highest interests. Kuhn – art is no longer religious and the artist is deracinated (*entheimatet*). Patočka – art

Without dwelling on the merits of the various interpretations, what is essential to point out here is that the thesis of the end of art is said in many ways. And this not only after having said farewell to Hegel's philosophy and developing problems in other contexts and with other perspectives, but even within Hegel studies and just by analysing Hegel's work. This polysemic character of the expression 'end of art' is one of the reasons for the complexity and vitality of the debate on the subject. It therefore makes sense to take a closer look.

2 Back to Hegel

In the previous chapter, I very briefly took into account Hegel's philosophy of art only as the origin of a long discourse, that of the end of literature. This was necessary in order to discuss the history of its many subsequent developments. Because the thesis on the end of art and of literature has produced such a vast and complex echo, and also because a large part of the differences in interpretations has their origin in the Hegelian context, it probably makes sense to return to Hegel and investigate his position in a more detailed way. To find a compass in this whole series of interpretations and meanings, perhaps we just have to go back *ad fontes*.

2.1 A Hegelian Polysemy and the Case of Literature

The fact that the thesis of the end of art has been said in so many ways is without a doubt linked to the constant interest that this aspect of Hegel's thought has aroused. This interest has clearly not only been fostered by the subsequent and, so to speak, 'external' re-elaborations, but also and above

has become a speciality. Wagner – art shows a loss of substance, an increase in subjectivity and in the importance of technique. Wiesel – the interest in art is no longer religious, but philosophical' (Bungay 1984, 71–89, here 74).

all by substantial specialised work.³ The countless debates within the so-called *Hegel-Forschung* have continued to enrich, and make more complex, the interpretations of the thesis. This is mainly due to the fact that the thesis on the end of art has always appeared as an effective conceptual tool for understanding the transformations of the art of the present: the success of the debate on the thesis has always been accompanied and sustained by the strength of its relevance for contemporary times.

Indeed, in the last years there has been a renewed interest in Hegel's philosophy of art and in the renowned thesis. This is also part of a more general rediscovery of the thinker of Stuttgart, especially in English-language studies and in confrontations with the analytic tradition.⁴ Nevertheless, to be even more precise, the so-called Hegel-Renaissance of the last few years is only one of a long series of 'Hegel-Renaissances', which have resulted in a troubled history of claimed inheritances and continuous rebirths.⁵ At regular intervals, polemics seem to break out involving those who claim the 'use' of such philosophy for the present (with an apologetic attitude or otherwise) and those who (with or without a prejudging attitude) emphasise the 'abuse' of it, producing a sort of further topic, the topic of the contemporary relevance of Hegel, within the critical debate.⁶

This constantly renewed interest for Hegelian thought has also certainly affected the philosophy of art and the thesis on its end.⁷ Among the most specific reasons for the growing interest of recent years, there is definitely the work already mentioned in the previous chapter on the

³I discuss a division between 'external' approaches (such as Danto's) and 'specialist' approaches (such as Gethmann-Sieft's and, with greater hermeneutical freedom, Pippin's) in the debate on the end of art in Campana (2016, 38–69).

⁴Among the most recent wide-ranging studies, see Halbig et al. (2004), Rockmore (2005), Redding (2007), Nuzzo (2010), De Caro and Illetterati (2012), and Corti (2014).

⁵Without claiming to be comprehensive or exhaustive of all possible examples, there are those who backdate such a rediscovery, always within the Anglo-Saxon context, to a few decades before: Harris (1983). Those who speak of a Hegel-Renaissance for France locate it a few years before: Poster (1973), Biemel (1974). And the same terms have been used to indicate the neo-Kantian interest of the first decades of the twentieth century: Levy (1927).

⁶For the multiplicity of developments in the reception of Hegel's thought and for the sense of its contemporary relevance in the second half of the twentieth century, see among others: Kaltenbrunner (1970), Negt (1971), Heede and Ritter (1973), Pippin (2015, 29–138).

⁷Discussions on the topic of the continuous coming back of the thesis on the end of art as a problem (and the constant renewal of interest in Hegel's *Lectures*) are present in: Gethmann-Sieft (1981), Gethmann-Sieft (1994), and Campana (2016, 13–38).

students' manuscripts containing notes from Hegel's lectures⁸; but there have also been many theoretical impulses, often stimulated by the novelties and evolutions of the world of contemporary art. I have tried above, with a few undoubtedly non-exhaustive examples, to give a picture of the multiplicity of readings about it. But if we are to approach the topic of this chapter, then it is necessary to note that, within the critical literature, there is not only a debate between different positions, but we find, also in recent times, a variety of interpretations about what the 'end of art' means even within the singular positions and individual analyses of Hegel scholars.⁹ And this is not because of an inconsistency in Hegel's arguments nor because of inaccuracies due to the different student notebooks: it is a result of the complexity of the subject matter and the very notion of the end of art. We are dealing with a 'polysemy' that is first of all in Hegel, a polysemy that feeds on the many elements and multiple directives that are already present in his aesthetic thought. Or so I will try to show in the following analysis of his philosophical position on the literary work of art.

Before engaging in this analysis, however, there is one more thing to emphasise regarding the relationship between the thesis of the end of art and the topic of the contemporary relevance of Hegel's thought. This has to do with the case of literature and its peculiarity compared to the other kinds of art: both Hegelian aesthetics and the thesis on the end of art have been rediscovered through a contemporary perspective, considering art as a whole or especially with regard to the figurative arts, whereas

⁸For a discussion on the manuscript editions, see *passim* Chapter 3.

⁹To give just a few examples, Martin Donougho identifies six meanings, mostly connected with each other, of the thesis of the end of art: (1) art no longer represents the ultimate truth and supreme values that art was able to convey and embody in the times of ancient Greece; (2) reflection has replaced intuition and representation in our way of life and in our attitude towards art; (3) times are no longer favourable for the production of new art; (4) the dialectic between form and content has exhausted its possibilities and is not subject to new developments; (5) contemporary art is experiencing its final phase (as museum art, *Biedermeier* style, objective humour, humanistic *Weltliteratur* or world art, or perhaps in the fragmentary form of the epigram and so on); (6) art is 'essentially' past (Donougho 2007, especially 181–189). Stephen Houlgate has recently identified three meanings: (1) art finds its logical (not historical) end in comedy (especially with Aristophanes' comedies); (2) modern times have experienced the historical disintegration (*Zerfall*) of art, on the one hand, through subjective humour (e.g. by Jean Paul), and, on the other, with the representation of prosaic, everyday life; (3) art participates in the general development and fulfilment of the spirit and no longer satisfies the highest needs and the highest vocation of human beings, which are sought in religion and, above all, in philosophy, which replaces art as a form that conveys the highest value of truth (Houlgate 2013, especially 264–271).

there are not so many recent attempts to read the literary production following the death of Hegel or even contemporary literature through a Hegelian lens. As for the other arts, the most recent and relevant case is the previously mentioned *After the Beautiful. Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* by Robert B. Pippin, which tries to derive, on the basis of an internal and specialist reading of the Hegelian texts, an interpretive key useful for the understanding of Impressionist painting and artists such as Édouard Manet and Paul Cézanne (Pippin 2014).

Obviously, this does not mean at all that there are no relevant studies in the *Hegel-Forschung* which underline the centrality of the literary phenomenon in Hegel's philosophy of art and point out its influence. On the contrary, since literature plays such a decisive role in Hegel's thought on art, there has been a great deal of research that investigates the complexity of the phenomenon from a number of perspectives and different points of view.¹⁰

¹⁰To give an overview: several studies have acutely proposed an overall reconstruction of the role of literature within the framework of Hegel's thought (Wagner 1974; Szondi 1974b; Shapiro 1975; Gadamer 1986; Hirt 1999; Baptist 2005; Werle 2005; Vieira da S. Filho 2008; Ophälders 2014; Ferreira 2015; Hebing 2018). Numerous essays have focused on more specific topics such as tragedy (Bradley 1950; Pöggeler 1962; Axelos 1965; Kaufmann 1971; Szondi 1974a; Gravel 1978; Petercil 1979; Corvi 1988; Donougho 1989; Schulte 1992; Schmidt 2001; Roche 1998; Roche 2002/2003; Garelli 2010, 107–125; Stocker 2015; Caramelli 2016, 117–149) or comedy (Roche 1998; Hebing 2015a; Moland 2016; Moland 2018); some contributors have stressed, with particular attention to literature, the central problem of the relationship between the philosophy of literary art and the philosophy of action, with reference both to the *Lectures on Aesthetics* (Menegoni 1993, 135–184; Sandis 2010) and to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Speight 2001); some other researches have inquired into the analysis of a particular genre such as the novel (Müller 1970; Hiebel 1974; Papi 1983; Hebing 2009; Voßkamp 2014; Stocker 2018, 70–76) or have examined Hegel's analysis of some decisive literary figures such as Aristophanes (Garelli 2011) or Shakespeare (Kottman 2018). We should not forget the monographic issue on 'Hegel in Comparative Literature' of the *Review of National Literatures*, with interventions ranging from the relationship between the Hegelian theory of literature and that of Aristotle, to the influence of the first on that of Francesco De Sanctis (Weiss 1970) and the more recent special issue on 'Hegel and Literature' of the *Hegel Bulletin* (Stone 2010). Furthermore, as already mentioned, it has also been analysed, sometimes in areas unrelated to the more strictly Hegelian research (Zima 1995, 1; Urbich 2011, 41) and, recently, more in depth within a Hegelian framework (Habib 2019), how Hegel's *Aesthetics* has been fundamental to a large part of the literary theories of the twentieth century until now. Finally, detached from this group, but always dealing with a kind of relationship between Hegel and literature, it is worth mentioning the recent book by Nuzzo, in which the author tries to discuss the *Science of Logic* through an interpretative framework constituted by works such as Melville's *Billy Budd*, Molière's *Tartuffe* and Beckett's *Endgame* (Nuzzo 2018).

What has not been proposed, or rather, with a few exceptions,¹¹ has not been proposed with the same force and significance compared to art in general or other fields of art, is the attempt to make Hegel's philosophy of literature and his thesis on the end-of-art dialogue with the literary production after his death. What in the specialist research has remained in the background more than with other kinds of artistic expression is the questioning of Hegelian thought with reference to contemporary literature. Nonetheless, literature, or rather, 'the art of speech, poetry in general',¹² as Hegel defines it, has a preminent place in his general philosophical-artistic thought. If there is an art on which to test the effectiveness in a contemporary perspective of the thesis on the end, it is literature. This is precisely the aim of my argument both here and in the following chapter and is one of the main purposes of this study.

¹¹An interesting volume in this regard is the one edited by Bainard Cowan and Joseph G. Kronick, in which, from a Hegelian framework, interpretations of American literature and authors such as Hawthorne, Melville and Wallace Stevens are proposed (Cowan and Kronick 1991). See also the volume of Bonessio di Terzet, which concludes his analysis with an application to twentieth-century lyric poetry (Bonessio di Terzet 1976, 91–128). Cf. also Kukla (1998) and Kohl (2005).

¹²*Ästh. II*, 261/626. Cf. *von der Pfordten* 1826, 176; *Kehler* 1826, 156; *Griesheim* 1826, 770. One can ask why Hegel prefers to use the term 'poetry' (*Poesie*) to indicate literature in general and not that of 'literature' (*Literatur*). The first answer is exclusively historical: as noted in the second chapter, the term 'literature' emerges in modernity and only after strong resistance and semantic shifts, which were still present at the time of Hegel, does it replace the term 'poetry' used in this way. However, one can also try to glimpse a theoretical motivation in this choice. Precisely because the term 'literature' pertains to a linguistic contest of modernity, Hegel may have preferred to use 'poetry', because the meaning it gives to this word refers mainly to the conception of literature before the end of art and therefore before modernity (whereas for the art that goes towards its end, as we will see in a moment, it uses the word 'prose' [*Prose*]). Developing this reasoning, it would be a choice in line with the shift, underlined by Peter Szondi, in the first of his lectures on the ancient and modern in the German aesthetics around 1800s, from 'poetics' as a 'technical doctrine of poetry' to 'aesthetics' as a 'theory of the poetic' (Szondi 1974a, 13). Or in the terms he uses in his book on the tragic, following F. Th. Vischer and E. Staiger, the shift from the phrase the 'poetics of tragedy' to that of the 'philosophy of the tragedy' (Szondi 2011, 151/1). In this case, the term 'poetics' indicates the ancient treatment of literature, made up of an empirical-inductive approach aimed also (but not exclusively) at practice; the term 'theory' or 'philosophy' of the work of art, by contrast, refers to the modern approach in which, especially in the German debate around 1800, a speculative-inductive attitude emerges—one could say, with Hegel, a 'prosaic' one—in conceiving literature. This division between an empirical-inductive and a speculative-deductive approach will be indirectly contested later by Ducrot and Todorov (1972, 193) and Genette (1979, 70–71) who emphasise the effective impossibility of separating the two levels. However, if in the first case we find ourselves still before the end of art, in the second we are after and precisely because art has reached its end. It and our attitude towards it have changed: a critical-theoretical vision has emerged. I owe to Paul Kottman the initial intuition of this reasoning. In what follows, together with the more technical 'poetry', the modern 'literature' will be used to describe the complex of literary art.

In the next paragraph, I will show the role that literature has in Hegel's philosophy of art and then move on to the specific interpretation I want to propose of the thesis on the end of art as it bears on literature.

2.2 The Role of Literature in Hegel's Philosophy of Art

Literature plays a leading role within Hegel's philosophy of art. Nevertheless, its function is dual, paradoxical and in some way ambiguous: in Hegel's account, literature is at the top of the system of the particular arts as the art that most exemplifies the very notion of art and, at the same time, it is already something beyond art; it is something that in some way is or risks being no longer art, something other than art.

According to Hegel, literature is the particular art which is also able to represent art in general. Literature—says Hegel—is 'the most accomplished art, the art κατ'ἐξοχήν,¹³ that is the most prominent kind of art among the particular arts, the art *par excellence*: it stands as 'the absolute and true art of the spirit and its expression as spirit'.¹⁴

This assessment—which Hegel shares with various coeval reflections on art and which in a sense belongs to a common trend of the time—mainly has to do with the fact that literature comes at the end of a process of 'spiritualisation'¹⁵ that the particular arts go through. Literature, with its liberation from materiality as its *medium*, as well as in the artistic use of language, is the completion of this process. Literature, as the most accomplished art, is for Hegel the result of both (1) its relationship to the other particular arts and (2) its relationship, as the most representative kind of art, to the other forms of absolute spirit, especially philosophy.

(1) Literature comes at the end of the system of the particular arts, after a progression that sees the sequence of architecture, sculpture, painting and music. Totality (*Totalität*) and perfection (*Vollkommenheit*) outline its profile: it constitutes a sort of catalyst of the features that are dispersed

¹³ Kehler 1826, 197. Cf. von der Pfordten 1826, 222; Griesheim 1826, 844.

¹⁴ *Ästh. II*, 261/626. Cf. Kehler 1826, 156; von der Pfordten 1826, 176; Griesheim 1826, 770; Heimann 1828/1829, 189.

¹⁵ Cf. Wagner (1974, 164).

in the multiplicity of other particular arts and, for this reason, plays the role of the exemplary model for art in general.¹⁶

Hegel designs the classification within the system of the particular arts according to various guidelines. Frank Dietrich Wagner identifies three criteria for the subdivision of this system: (a) the criterion of materiality and of the senses, (b) the criterion based on spatio-temporal relationships and (c) the criterion grounded on the dialectic between objective-exteriority and subjective-interiority. In this way, we range from a starting point of architecture, which is (a) a figurative and visible art, (b) eminently spatial and (c) on the side of the object. We pass through sculpture, which shares the same characteristics, even if attenuated. We then move on to painting, which has in common the first two features but already arises between objective-exteriority and an increasingly marked subjectivity, up to music, which is (a) sonorous, audible, (b) temporal and (c) a subjective art. To these criteria, we can add (d) the one that refers to the art-historical periods identified by Hegel, according to which architecture is the art that is most suited to symbolic art, namely the pre-classical art of the oldest civilisations, sculpture that is the typical art of classical Greece, up to painting and music that are arts of modernity, or, as Hegel says, of the romantic era.

With respect to this classification, and therefore with respect to the other particular arts, literature has a transversal character. All these find as their common denominator the progressive abandonment of sensibility, which is the main element of art in general, towards an ever more intense taking hold of the spiritual element. A progression from the most natural, solid and silent materiality of architecture to the verbally articulated and, therefore, maximally spiritual immateriality of literature. A transition that goes from the most inorganic nature to the most human spiritual.¹⁷

¹⁶Cf. Gethmann-Siefert (2005, 313).

¹⁷Unlike music, the liberation of literature from its material is effective. Music is characterised by the fact that it corresponds to the complete, immediate and inner subjectivity, which constitutes its content, but which in itself eliminates the spatial dimension. To express itself and therefore to come into existence, it needs a material that vibrates and transforms it into sound, it needs an instrument (*Ästh II*, 140–141/527). In this sense, the liberation from the materiality of music is completely abstract, and therefore false. Only poetry, through the figurative representation of language, will complete the path towards spiritualisation. Cf. Szondi 1974b, 473; Hebing 2018, 228–231. For a detailed analysis of Hegel's philosophy of music, see Olivier (2003).

Literature frees itself definitively from the ‘importance of the material’ (*Ästh. III*, 232; 966). To some extent, spirit itself becomes its material.¹⁸ The internal relationship between the artist’s imagination and the outside world changes: the material it elaborates is not something perceptibly objective, but becomes the fantasy itself that serves as, one could say, the ‘immaterial material’ of poetry. This ‘immaterial materiality’ is expressed by figurative imaginations (*bildliche Vorstellungen*),¹⁹ and language, as a ‘collection of representations’ (*von der Pfordten 1826*, 223), becomes with words the expressive mode through which representations are realised in reality.

Representation stands at a very peculiar level, ‘between intuition and thought’ (*Hotho 1823*, 489/411). In its being properly poetic, it presents the abstract universality of thought in a sensibly concrete, particular, individual form. Representation is not intuition, because it does not possess the determination and materiality of what is sensible, and it is not thought because it does not provide the understanding that is achieved through the concept.²⁰ Linguistic images constitute this intermediate dimension that frees poetry from the physical material and differentiates it from the other arts.²¹ They operate through periphrasis that, from the point of view of the intellect, is superfluous, but from the poet’s point of view absolutely fundamental. In fact, alongside the language that Hegel calls ‘proper’, namely the language that remains at the level of the determination of what is meant to be said of the ‘thing’, there is a further level, the ‘improper’ one, which is added in a decisive way for poetry. Metaphors are an example of the latter; they add a further content to an already existing one. Hegel cites, as an instance, Homer’s comparison of Ajax, who does not want to escape, to a ‘stubborn donkey’ in book XI of *Ilias* (*Hotho*

¹⁸Cf. *Hotho 1823*, 486/407.

¹⁹*Hotho 1823*, 489/411.

²⁰Cf. *Enz.* 30, § 451.

²¹At *Enz.* 30, § 457 Anm., Hegel distinguishes symbolic, allegorical, poetic, and significant fantasy. There, he determines the freedom of poetic fantasy with respect to the figurative arts: ‘[p]oetic fantasy certainly uses the material more freely than the figurative arts; however, it too can choose only a sensitive material such that it is appropriate to the content of the idea to be represented.’

1823, 490/412).²² Here, to the primary content (the stubborn imperviousness of Ajax), a second one is added, necessary for poetry, which is that of the unshakable animal. Even more important, in Hegel's description of poetry in the strict sense, is versification, 'poetry's allure', which 'belongs essentially to poetry' (*Hotho* 1823, 278/413), even more than improper expression. The verse—on which Hegel dwells with very technical competence²³—shows how form and content are intimately connected in poetry: it may appear to be a merely formal addition, but instead, through it, the poet is helped in the choice and precise determination of the content she wants to express. The resonances to which the verse obliges her are a guarantee of the adequacy and necessity of the content with respect to the idea that comes to expression (*Hotho* 1823, 490/413).

In general, verbal representation through images is a specific dimension of poetry, always understood as literature in general, and it is that particular quality, more or less marked, that makes it radically (and problematically) different from other arts. It is in poetry's special use of the word that its true specificity lies. It is the place where form and content, abstraction and concreteness, divine and human, are joined together in a dialectical and free relationship that requires the necessary presence of both to be properly poetic and artistic. It is the dimension in which the artist can freely express herself, because she is no longer bound by the one-sidedness of sensible residues or intellectual abstractions.²⁴ This freedom makes it possible for literature to have, compared to the other particular arts, an

²²The use of figurative expression is exalted, however, by the poetry of the romantic age, where free subjectivity emerges in an accentuated way, whereas in ancient times the expression is more direct and linear, more objective (*Hotho* 1823, 490/412–413).

²³Hegel analyses in particular the historical passage from rhythmic versification to rhyme. In general, this passage describes a further progression from sensible naturalness to the spirituality of a (linguistic) world that becomes more and more prosaic. Moreover, in order to reaffirm the freedom and transversality of literature, there is also the possibility of a dialectic between the two modes of versification in the unification of rhythmic verses and rhyming verses, partly reproducing a structure similar to that between poetry and prose, on which I will dwell a little below (*Hotho* 1823, 491–492/413–415).

²⁴On the production of meaning in art through the dialectic of form and content, see Farina (2015a, 155–159).

omnilateral development, an exclusive breadth and a transversality that the other specific arts do not have.²⁵

In this way, from the point of view of the above-listed category of (a) the senses and the material, literature even has the possibility of containing at once all the senses and materials typical to the other arts. This is the case, for example, in drama—the peak of literary art, for Hegel—which integrates the other arts in its representation of action.²⁶ Action is certainly expressed only in literary words, but in order to make it real, literature joins a scene that may consist of architectural structures or natural landscapes, both products of pictorial art, sculptural images, the actors who play, animate and move expressing their inner life and through voices that can be musical. In this sense, in the Hegelian discourse, materiality can come back within the literary sphere as a structural element of it. So literature falls also within the senses of sight and hearing, which seemed to be replaced by an internal literary representation.²⁷ As regards (b) the spatio-temporal relationship and (c) the dialectic between objective-exteriority and subjective-interiority, the same argument of transversality holds valid, especially if we consider the internal division of literary genres, where a genre of objectivity and exteriority such as the epic is contrasted with that of the lyric, that is to say, the genre of subjectivity and interiority. Both are dialectically recovered in the comprehensively objective and subjective, exterior and interior, genre of the drama. This stands also for the form and content relationship, which, as mentioned above, is particularly close in poetry. And again, the form-content connection can at the same time be differentiated into genres, where epic tends towards content, lyric tends towards form, and drama unites the two (*Hotho* 1823, 493–494/416–417). This represents a self-differentiating unity, differences enclosed in a single dimension, that of the verbal representation of poetry through images.

²⁵Cf. on the notion of ‘transversality’ in Hegel’s conception of poetry, see Vizzardelli (1996, 47). The notion of freedom emerges in the Hegelian determination of poetry also with respect to history. Unlike poetry, history is not free in itself because it is conditioned unilaterally from the outside as regards the content given and the purpose. The same applies to rhetoric, which is limited by strict rules and conditioned by its general intent. Cf. *Hotho* 1823, 487–488/409–410.

²⁶Cf. *Ästh.* III, 504–505/1181–1182.

²⁷Cf. *Ästh.* III, 505–506/1182.

With respect to (d) the succession of art forms, literature belongs mainly to the romantic arts. This clearly derives from its profoundly spiritual aspect. However, precisely because of its eminent spiritual character and absence of perceptible material, it is not forced to identify itself with a specific art form (symbolic, classical, romantic), but, while remaining in the group of romantic arts along with painting and music, has the potential to mix all of them with equal effectiveness, thus becoming a ‘*universal art*’ (*Ästh.* III, 233; 967).²⁸ Thought of in terms of the relationship between form and content, antiquity has a more immediate relationship with the surrounding world and therefore tends to content; the classic period represents the balance of form and content; and the romantic era is more marked by the formal aspect. In this sense, the universal character of poetry leads it, even historically, to cover every age with an adequacy that cannot be found elsewhere in the other arts.²⁹

Literature unites in itself the deepest features of the idea of art, which were already partially present in the other particular arts. That is, it succeeds in summarising in itself what in these were autonomously dispersed and insufficient, because not yet united in an organic totality. Accomplishing this work of unification, literature poses itself as the model, the most appropriate norm through which one can read artistic phenomenon.

This ensures that poetry reaches the highest level of depth and freedom regarding what constitutes the essence of art:

For the nature of poetry coincides in general with the conception of the beauty of art and works of art as such, since the poetic imagination differs from the imagination in the visual arts and music where, owing to the kind of material in which it intends to work, it is restricted in its creation in many ways and driven in separate and one-sided directions. The poetic

²⁸Cf. *Ascheberg 1820/1821*, 187. For a discussion of the collocation of the individual arts in the framework of the historical forms of art, see Winfield (1996, 106–113). On the characterisation and succession of historical forms 2007 of art, cfr. also Pinkard (2007).

²⁹Hegel says: ‘[i]t is true that we see architecture arising likewise amongst the most different nations and in the whole course of centuries, but sculpture reached its zenith in the ancient world, amongst the Greeks and Romans, just as painting and music have done in the modern world amongst Christian peoples. Poetry, however, enjoys its periods of brilliance and success in all nations and at practically every period which is productive of art at all. For it embraces the entire spirit of mankind, and mankind is particularised in many ways’ (*Ästh.* III, 245/977).

imagination, *per contra*, is subject only to the essential demands of an Ideal and artistically adequate mode of representation. (*Ästh.* III, 238/971)³⁰

For these reasons, literature is for Hegel the particular art that coincides with art in general. This means that literature contains in itself all the most peculiar features of the artistic fact to the greatest extent of any particular art, but at the same time, it also manages to share the fate of the arts and therefore represents the most significant place where the thesis of the end of art has to be tested. This becomes evident when one looks at the second relationship cited above, that is, the relationship between literature as the most representative art and the other spheres of absolute spirit, philosophy in particular.

(2) This relationship is particularly complex, since literature is placed, from the point of view of the system, in a borderline position with respect to religion and philosophy. Within the Hegelian system, both in the *Lectures of Aesthetics* and in the latest two versions of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*,³¹ art is in fact the first form of absolute spirit, that is the last and highest phase of the long journey traversed by spirit. After art, as is well known, we find religion and philosophy: art is the domain of intuition (*Anschauung*), religion belongs to the dimension of representation (*Vorstellung*), while philosophy is expressed in the concept (*Begriff*).³²

Literature, which represents the culmination of the progress of the particular arts, lies at the extreme boundary of art and, in a certain sense, already looks at the other forms of absolute spirit. This fact essentially

³⁰Cf. Kehler 1826, 197; von der Pfordten 1826, 223; Griesheim 1826, 844.

³¹In the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia* (1817), religion and art are united in the 'religion of art', which then takes up the 'artistic religion' already present in *Phenomenology*. Starting with the edition of 1827 and then in the last edition of 1830, art acquires its autonomy. For a detailed analysis of the paragraphs on art in the *Encyclopaedia*, see Gethmann-Siefert (2000) and Siani (2009).

³²Art, belonging to the sphere of absolute spirit, deals with the true, and therefore 'in its content, art stands on one and the same ground with religion (in the stricter sense of the word) and philosophy' (*Ästh.* I, 139/101). For this reason, art, religion and philosophy differ only in the *forms* in which they bring home to consciousness their object, the Absolute (and by 'forms' he means intuition, representation and concept). Cf. *Enz.* § 556, § 565, § 572. Cf. also *WdL* 236/735, from the point of view of philosophy: philosophy 'has the same content and the same purpose as art and religion, but it is the highest mode of apprehending the absolute idea, because its mode, that of the concept, is the highest'.

distinguishes it from the other particular arts; from this point of view, literature is presented as something substantially different compared to them. In other words, it is understood as something exceptional.³³ It is fully integrated into art as an explanatory model for, and incarnation of, the very notion of art. At the same time, it is borderline—going in part beyond art. With a paradox that seems consistent with the subject in question, we could say that poetry, understood as literature in general, is the exception that *constitutes* the rule.³⁴

The most relevant reason for this exceptionality lies in the medium that literature uses, namely the verbal language, which is shared by both religion and, above all, philosophy.³⁵ The medium of the word allows literature, as we have seen, to acquire the transversality and freedom that make it the most representative art. At the same time, paradoxically, this spirituality increasingly distances it from the dominion that is proper to art, namely sensibility.³⁶

Its liminal position thus conceals a profound risk. What literature gains on the spiritual side, it loses with respect to the sensible, that is with respect to the essentially aesthetic dimension.³⁷ Although the spiritual side is able to overcome its merely negational orientation to the sensible, the danger of it turning into something that is no longer art is always present. Literature's particular trait, the marked tendency towards de-materialisation and spiritualisation, which represents its strong point, can turn into its most serious insufficiency (*Ästh. III*, 235/968–969).³⁸ Poetic fantasy has, therefore, the very difficult task of moving in the limited space 'between the abstract universality of thought and the sensuously concrete corporeal

³³Hegel claims: 'poetry as a totality is [...] to be essentially distinguished from the specific arts whose characters it combines in itself' (*Ästh. III*, 225/961).

³⁴I discuss literature in Hegel as an exception that constitutes the rule in Campana (2015).

³⁵Already the fact that poetry as art is given through "representations" (*Vorstellungen*), although "figurative" (*bildliche*), demonstrates the exceptionality of the artistic genre. If representation, in fact, is the proper medium of religion and sensible intuition is that of art, the medium of poetry, combining representation with images, abstraction and concreteness, denotes the fact that we are dealing with a very particular phenomenon. It looks at something beyond itself (*Vorstellung*) while still remaining itself (*bildlich*). For a sketch of the framework of the debate on language in Hegel and related bibliographical insights, see: Vernon (2007, 17–31 and 151–158).

³⁶On the notion of sensibility in Hegel's philosophy of art, see D'Angelo (1989, 21–29).

³⁷*Ästh. II*, 261/626–627.

³⁸Cf. *Hotho* 1823, 486–487/408.

objects' (*Ästh. III*, 231/965) and must try to satisfy, by adopting the most different precautions, the general conditions of the work of art.³⁹

This determines the exceptional character of poetry and its peculiar role compared to the other arts, the role that makes it the most accomplished kind of art and, at the same time, the most likely candidate to flirt with its fate to end as art. Hegel says:

poetry appears as that particular art in which art itself begins at the same time to dissolve and acquire in the eyes of philosophy its point of transition to religious representation as such, as well as to the prose of scientific thought. The realm of the beautiful [...] is bordered on one side by the prose of finitude and commonplace thinking, out of which art struggles on its way to truth, and on the other side the higher spheres of religion and philosophy where there is a transition to that apprehension of the Absolute which is still further removed from the sensuous sphere. (*Ästh. III*, 234–235/968; modified transl.)

In other words, poetry, namely literature, seems therefore to be caught between two poles: on the one hand, the 'prose of scientific thought', that is a scientific discourse of a certain philosophical kind (through 'religious representation as such') and on the other hand, the 'prose of finitude and commonplace thinking', which describes the use of speech and words in everyday life.

One ought to underline the fact that when Hegel uses the dichotomy between poetry and prose, here and on other occasions, the two terms do not correspond precisely to what is usually meant by them when we analyse a literary artwork. Their semantic field is much wider than a simple description of the formal structure of a text, to which however in some ways they refer. In this sense, poetry is not only reducible to the specific literary genre of lyric and is not identifiable exclusively with versification (a fundamental element, but not unique in its determination). At the same time, prose

³⁹'The basic demand necessitated here is limited to this: (i) that the subject-matter shall not be conceived either in terms of scientific or speculative thinking or in the form of wordless feeling or with the clarity and precision with which we perceive external objects, and (ii) that it shall not enter our ideas with the accidents, fragmentation, and relativities of *finite* reality' (*Ästh. III*, 231/965). Cf. Gadamer (1986).

does not correspond only to forms of writing which do not rhyme.⁴⁰ On the contrary, the two concepts serve to outline a much more comprehensive vision of the artistic fact, a ‘way of conceiving’ (*Auffassungsweisen*),⁴¹ ‘two different spheres of consciousness’ (*zwei unterschiedene Sphären des Bewußtseins*)⁴² and two notions that describe a configuration of the artistic fact extending beyond the field of works of art.⁴³ They are two general dimensions not easy to determine, whose boundaries are blurred, because poetry, which uses the immaterial medium of the word, is at the same time ‘in itself concrete and can hold firm multiple sides’ (*Hotho 1823, 492/416*). Poetry and prose (which is divided into prose of thought and prose of everyday life) are categories that describe conditions, trends that cross the literary field and ways in which the freedom of literary art is expressed.⁴⁴

This specific case of the long quotation above exemplifies the variety of meanings included in Hegel’s thesis of the end of art. The two poles of the prose of thought and of the prose of everyday life represent two ways of understanding the thesis: two differing and complementary meanings that, in a certain sense, literature seems to have in itself as constitutive and that radically differentiates it from all the other particular arts, because of its very particular medium of language. The first one denotes the end of art understood as a philosophisation of art, here represented by the risk that poetic language becomes the ‘prose of scientific thought’; the second one is signified by the ‘prose of finitude and commonplace thinking’ or, as Hegel calls it, the ‘prose of the world’, here understood as the tendency of art to approach everyday life ever more closely.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ See Szondi (1974b, 487–490).

⁴¹ *Ästh. III*, 238/972, modified translation.

⁴² *Ästh. III*, 244/976, modified translation.

⁴³ They can give back, for example, the profile of the spiritual moment of a population or a civilisation, including historical and social dynamics, general world visions, national characters and general feelings.

⁴⁴ On the relationship between poetry and prose, see first of all Vieira Da S. Filho (2008), who develops a reading of Hegel’s *Aesthetics* from these concepts. See also Werle (2005, 79–90) and Hebing (2018, 232–236). As is well known, this distinction will find a successful development in the long and passionate deepening of the relationships between poetry and prose as well as between poetry and literature, by Benedetto Croce. Among other works, see Croce (2017).

⁴⁵ For instance: *Ästh. I*, 199/150.

3 Philosophisation

On the basis of Hegel's philosophy of art, a way to interpret the thesis of the end is surely to see in it a kind of philosophisation of art: 'poetry', in the sense of literature, 'ends', in the sense that it risks becoming the 'prose of scientific thought', namely reflection, reasoning, and thinking. Literary language turns out to be more technical, scientific and cognitive. Literature sees on the horizon the danger of changing its connotations, converting itself into something different: present in front of it is the prospect of going towards the dominion of philosophy (via religion) and approaching it, eventually reaching the point that it becomes philosophy.

As we can see, this is the interpretation that was represented here by the most general and perhaps relevant reading of Danto's view, according to which the work of art has been reflected into itself so radically as to question its own status, to turn itself into a question about art and, in general, about the world around it.⁴⁶ It is an interpretation that does not give great significance to the historical-epochal contextualisation of artistic phenomena (as will be the second possibility that will be presented below). It is concerned only with the position of art within the Hegelian system. And if it represents in part a forced reading, an over-interpretation, of the Hegelian texts, it nevertheless, besides having been proven to be hermeneutically effective with regard to the artistic phenomena of the twentieth century, finds a good deal of textual evidence in Hegelian sources, as can already be noticed through the passage quoted above.⁴⁷

This kind of reading is in some way related to the topic of the 'dissolution of art' (*Auflösung der Kunst*): it describes the fact that, radically in modernity and in less incisive ways in other historical passages, art transmutes itself, changes its status, dissolves itself as art or as art as it was

⁴⁶Cf. also Pippin (2002).

⁴⁷There has been much controversy surrounding this kind of reading and, above all, the use of Hegel's thought which Danto proposes. Among the most significant criticisms is the underestimation of the religious form: in this reading, we pass almost directly from the dominion of art into that of philosophy, nearly without considering the intermediate realm of religion. Some critics, then, have pointed out that in Hegel, rather than a philosophisation of art, art simply leaves room for art criticism, not changing in any way its original status. For some of the most significant positions, see: Hilmer (1998), Gethmann-Siefert (2013), Houlgate (2013), Iannelli (2014a).

known before.⁴⁸ The notion of this transformation, of this 'dissolution', is essential to this reading, and in the Hegelian texts is strictly related to two other notions, which I will briefly describe because they are relevant to the general profile of this 'pole': comedy and ugliness.⁴⁹

Comedy is an important genre within Hegel's philosophy of literature and philosophy of art in general. Comical subjectivity here has nothing to do with the 'nihilism' of the early Romantic irony that stands above everything and everyone and destroys whatever it meets.⁵⁰ The laugh of the comedian goes only against what is wrong and false and it demolishes it in order to bring out the substantial; it helps us find what is true and what matters. It is Aristophanes' laugh, which is not an irresponsible and blind laugh, but a laugh worried about the fate of the *polis*; it is a laugh that regrets the removal of the community from what is ethical, the corruption and degeneration that Athenian democracy was producing. It is a positive, intelligent, rational dissolution that leads to a transformation of what is

⁴⁸Hegel describes almost all the epochal turns of art history as an 'Auflösung' of the previous form of art into the new one. In modernity (and also in drama, especially comedy), the 'Auflösung' regards the very notion of art.

⁴⁹Both are notions that Hegel deepens by articulating them internally and putting them in relation to notions similar to them. So, for example, comedy is flanked by satire, *Lustspiel*, subjective humour and objective humour and contrasts, albeit with common roots, irony. The ugly, in turn, is accompanied, for example, by the not-more-beautiful, the bizarre and the grotesque. All these determinations have differences, even significant ones. For reasons of space, in order to describe them in more detail, I refer to the studies mentioned in the footnotes. What interests me here is to indicate in the comic and in the ugly two significant categories, which can be understood as the outcome of the tendency to philosophisation and ordinariness and which, interpreted in a broad sense, can describe the modalities that concern the literary work of art and its end.

⁵⁰As is well known, Hegel was always a ruthless critic of the early Romantic group of Athenaeum, and one of the most contested notions between Hegel and the Romantics has been irony as an expression of destructive and irresponsible subjectivity. The Hegelian criticism of Romanticism in general is addressed by Pöggeler (1999). For a general discussion on the concept of romantic irony, see among others: Prang (1972), Strohschneider-Kohrs (1977, 1989). The debate on Hegel's criticism of irony is very broad and varied. There are, for example, those who have strongly questioned the correctness of Hegel's interpretation (Wälzel 1938); those who have spoken of a 'misunderstanding' that would have led Hegel to emphasise the subjective side of romantic irony, without taking into account the objective one highlighted later by Walter Benjamin in his dissertation *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* (Bohrer 1989, 25–38, 138–181); there are those who have reconstructed Hegel's and Friedrich Schlegel's positions underlining their affinities, especially taking into account the thought of the young Schlegel (Pöggeler 1983, 340–348); those who have tried to understand the affinities, differences and underlying theoretical reasons behind the two thoughts (Zovko 2007, 148–154); or those who have highlighted the positive aspects of Hegel's interpretation of irony as a form of scepticism, from a literary and not practical point of view (Vieweg 2007, 193–213).

dissolved and to a radical change of what has been. Hegel's evaluation of comedy is very high, and it is not by chance that comedy is the last literary genre analysed in the Hegelian *Lectures*, because it is through it that art dissolves itself as such and leaves space for other forms of spirit, to the 'prose of scientific thought': 'comedy leads at the same time to the dissolution of art altogether [*zur Auflösung der Kunst überhaupt*]' (*Ästh. III*, 572/1236).⁵¹

The dissolution of art also points to the possibility to losing the wholeness of the form and content and to abandoning itself to irregularity. Especially in romantic art, beauty, which for Hegel finds the most harmonious configuration in the classical period, leaves space for ugliness. Art dissolves the harmonious 'roundness' of the Greek ideal of beauty and becomes something no-longer-beautiful. The Olympic imperturbability of classical art is overturned, and art can explicitly stage, for example, the painful and atrocious suffering of Christ on the Way of the Cross: 'Christ scourged, with the crown of thorns, carrying his cross to the place of execution, nailed to the cross, passing away in the agony of a torturing and slow death—this cannot be portrayed in the forms of Greek beauty' (*Ästh. II*, 152/538). But it is not just about pain and suffering, the no-longer-beautiful covers a wide range of possibilities, through which art (especially romantic art) 'intertwines its inner being with the contingency of the external world and gives unfettered play to the bold lines of the ugly'.⁵² Dissolution can, therefore, also mean becoming grotesque, outrageous, incongruous or bizarre.⁵³ In a wider sense: something different, unconventional, strange, or, in some cases, simply new.

In this way, the pole of the 'prose of the scientific thought' characterises the possibility of a radical transformation of the artwork as we have known it so far. The work of art that goes towards that pole begins to move in

⁵¹Cfr. Heimann 1828/1829, 207. For a systematic and detailed study of comedy as an aesthetic self-understanding of modern subjectivity, see Hebing (2015a). See also Moland (2016), where the systematic and philosophical-historical reasons for the Hegelian preference for comedy over tragedy are addressed, and Moland (2018), on the distinction between comedy and humour and on subjective and objective humours in reference to the end of art. Cf. Law (2000) and, again in relation to tragedy, Roche (1998).

⁵²*Ästh. II*, 139/527.

⁵³On the notion of ugliness in Hegel's *Aesthetics*, see especially the already-mentioned Iannelli (2007, 2014b).

a reflective, cerebral and philosophical direction. Art that looks in this direction is art that dissolves itself, reconfigures itself into a new, often irregular, mode. It is an art that tries to get out of the ordinary, that produces experimentations beyond its 'classical' (in a wide sense) constitution, and which can also use a comic attitude towards the infinite range of the 'no-longer-beautiful' in order to find the new and unexpected.

In romantic literary art and, above all, from the point of view of the novel—which is the genre that will interest us here the most—one of the clearest examples of this interpretation of the end of art is Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, a novel which Hegel loved and which also represents one of his examples used to describe humour as the objective laugh of the romantic age, the modern and rational version of comedy.⁵⁴

A couple of centuries earlier and as one of the main models for literary modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, for instance, include Sterne among their main models—*Tristram Shandy* expresses one of the most successful examples of the comedic novel and, at the same time, one of the most radical challenges for this genre; it is both one of the most representative novels in the history of the genre and one of the most stunning expressions of its end, perfectly representing the paradoxical dimension of the novel in Hegel's interpretation of the genre, which will be discussed below. And it is precisely in this duplicity—a convinced affirmation of the genre through its most desecrated and experimental negation—that *Shandy* stands out as one of the models of the novel as a genre, which perhaps has always been the genre that exists as and in this dissolution—i.e. in constant reformulation—of itself. With its experimentation on both linguistic and structural levels, as well as with its black or marbled pages and its drawings reflectively describing the progression of the same narration, *Shandy* tries to get out of the usual, classic (in a broad sense), well-rounded concept of literature and seems to venture into completely new territories. In such a way, this novel demonstrates the key to its modernity and its involvement in the end of literature.

⁵⁴Cf. *Ascheberg 1820/1821*, 113. Cf. Vieweg (2003) and Pierini (2013). On Hegel's treatment of Sterne, Hippel and Jean Paul, see also Moland 2018, 21–23.

In a certain sense, however, the introduction of certain themes and contexts—after all, *Shandy* represents nothing more than the infinitely domestic and ordinary situations (even in their exceptionality) of a ramshackle bourgeois family of the eighteenth century around the birth of the protagonist and then in his early years of life—can also be interpreted in terms of the second tension present in the possible interpretation of the thesis about the end of art, that of the ‘prose of finitude and commonplace thinking’.

4 Ordinairiness

In fact, if, on the one hand, the concepts of comedy and ugliness are two fundamental examples of the dissolution of art in the sense of the possibility of a change and shift, in a certain sense reflexive, towards something different from the ordinary conception of art after its end, both concepts—and especially that of the no-longer-beautiful—can also be used to introduce the second tension present in Hegel’s thesis on the end of art. As already said, there is another way of reading, alongside Hegel, the end of art, and it is probably a more faithful way to read Hegel than the first option presented above. Given that Hegel never explicitly spoke of an ‘end of art’, it can be said that this second interpretation is more consistent with the discourse produced by the Hegelian texts and is based on an interpretation of the thesis on the end of art as the *Vergangenheitscharakter* of art, as the ‘pastness character’ of art according to which—as Hegel says—‘art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past’ (*Ästh. I*, 25/11).⁵⁵

In this case and in opposition to the first option, the interpretation involves not so much the systematic aspect of Hegelian philosophy, but rather its epochal dimension. That art is ‘for us’ (modern people of Hegel’s time) a ‘thing of the past’ means the loss of its primacy from a socio-historical point of view. In the art-historical period that Hegel defines as symbolic, or the epoch of the ancient pre-classical civilisations, art was not yet at the centre of society because, according to Hegel, it was not

⁵⁵Cf. ‘For us, art in its seriousness is something bygone’ (*Hotho 1823*, 511/439).

yet properly art. On the contrary, in the ‘classical’ era, namely during the fifth century in Greece, art becomes the fulcrum of the *polis* and gives the community its own social, political and cultural meaning (think of ancient drama).⁵⁶ Finally, in modernity, or in the age that Hegel defines as romantic, namely when the end of art occurs, art has lost its role of primary importance and becomes something lateral, partial or secondary.⁵⁷

In this reading, reason and philosophy no longer and not so much permeate art, but rather society. Modern *Sittlichkeit*, in the division between the State and civil society, expresses the advance of rationality and the tendency towards the achievement of freedom. Under these conditions, art loses its key role in understanding the world and pointing the way forward. It thus falls back on other themes, other questions and other functions. In modern times, art certainly continues to exist, but it is no longer the repository of what is essential and divine for the community. This does not mean that it is no longer needed or that it does not serve at all; it only means that art takes on a different function. It can still be relevant in the eyes of society, even necessary, but in a new and, admittedly, secondary way.

For Hegel, the modern work of art is precisely the work in which artists arrive at the representation of free subjectivity, which modernity has produced. Yet the modern understanding of autonomy inflicts a fracture in the social harmony of the classical era. Romantic art therefore reflects in its representations the world that produced it, in which it finds itself at work and of which, in a certain sense, it is the victim. In this situation—and without a nostalgic attitude by Hegel—art, precisely because of the lateral role it has assumed, has lost the ability to convey determinate contents. It has lost the ability to convey the essential meanings of the previous eras and takes on the function, necessary though no longer primary, of what Hegel calls ‘formal culture’ (*formelle Bildung*).⁵⁸ In this *Bildung*, without

⁵⁶On the political relevance of drama, and especially tragedy, in the ancient Greece cf. Menke (1996, 104–111).

⁵⁷The ‘partial’ function and meaning that art takes on in modernity and within the State are addressed in Gethmann-Siefert (1986, 75).

⁵⁸The notion of *formelle Bildung* is present above all in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (cf., e.g., *Philosophie der Geschichte* 92–93/84–85). For an in-depth examination of the notion, see Kwon (2001), especially Chapters 4.2 and 4.3, 296–318.

transmitting any specific strong content, art becomes a possibility of orientation and discernment, through the solicitation of knowing and experiencing different, past and present, perspectives and ways of seeing the world; moreover, it can be interpreted as a dimension capable of preserving the uniqueness and humanity of the individual within the overwhelming modern State structure.⁵⁹ The work of art in modernity opens up space for the plurality of subjectivity's representations and can be assumed as a real contribution to a culture of freedom and encounter between different people.⁶⁰ In a society where rationality has led to historical awareness of the common relationships and institutions of the objective world, it is precisely because of its past character, that is, its inability to fully interpret the intelligibility of the community, that art remains for us 'one of our most precious bearers of historically indexed demands of mutuality' (Kottman 2018, 228).⁶¹

Art in modernity thus becomes interested in the human being as such, in the '*Humanus*', as Hegel calls it, that becomes the "new holy of holies" (*Ästh II*, 237/607).⁶² This expression is intended to describe the modern subjectivity in its universality, in the multiplicity of its possibilities, in the variety of life situations. Opening to the whole human soul, what enters artistic representation is also everyday life that, in modernity, becomes the main topic, with its ordinary banality, its flat and even boring progression, far from the unique events and exceptional characters of antiquity. In

⁵⁹This, in extreme synthesis, is one of the main theses in Siani (2010, 121–171).

⁶⁰Cf. Vieweg (2014, 102).

⁶¹In this sense, Kottman resolves the problems he identifies in Pippin's reading of the pastness of art. For Pippin, modern society has become 'at least incipiently rational, and rational in a way that no longer required distinctly sensible-affective comprehension', like that of art (Pippin 2014, 37). On the basis of Horowitz's criticism of Pippin (Horowitz 2014), if we stopped here, we would not consider an aspect that seems to contradict this reading, namely the fact that, according to Hegel, in modernity a rational discourse on art, which holds art in high esteem, arose. According to this view, Kottman argues that it is not entirely correct to argue that in modern society, 'there is nothing substantial left to be "*worked out*"' (Pippin 2014, 36–37). On the contrary, modern society reaches the awareness that the demands for understanding the world and ourselves have a historical, institutional, ethical dimension. Moreover, the complexity that these demands impose means that 'one way to reckon with the demands of mutual intelligibility, historically-ethically-institutionally, just is to face up to art's pastness'. Art, therefore, concludes Kottman, remains important in modernity precisely and thanks to its character of the past, because it is one of the ways with which to properly cross the challenges that society offers us (Kottman 2018, 228). For further discussions of Pippin's *After the Beautiful*, see Rush and Daub 2015 and Farina (2015b).

⁶²Cf. *Hotho* 1823, 442/352. Cf. Donougho (1982).

this sense, among the infinite facets of everyday life, paradoxically, we can also find the two elements of the departure of the work of art from its ordinary configuration, namely the comic and, above all, the ugly, the introduction of which opens the way to the artistic consideration of individual, common, simple and imperfect life.

One of the clearest examples is the everyday life represented by the Dutch painters of the seventeenth century, with their still lives, descriptions of the daily life in the fields, representations of the ordinary industriousness of the bourgeois and protestant city.⁶³ Another example is the work of artists like Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, who in his genre paintings represented children of the lower class with all the simplicity and tenderness of their ordinary life.⁶⁴

As far as the literary artwork is concerned, it is about dealing with the pole of the 'prose of finitude and commonplace thinking', to resume the Hegelian passage. As we will see more closely in Chapter 5, one of the most appropriate literary examples (especially with regard to the novel) in Hegel of this kind of end of literature is Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.⁶⁵ Wilhelm is a young man who starts his adventure in the world through a path of training and of self-recognition, setting himself ordinary goals such as getting married. Along the way, he finds himself facing the cold and prosaic obstacles of the modern world, from the achievement of one's ambitions to family relationships, from love affairs to dealings with the law and institutions. He and the novel's main character in general are knights in the world of everyday life: they are no longer like the ancient heroes. Wilhelm is a common human being who juggles all his expectations, his desires, and his anxieties in a world that does not immediately recognise him as an integrated part; a world that is now alien to him, but with which he is forced to deal. This *Bildungsroman* exemplarily shows how there are no more deeds of heroes in a mythical context, but only adventures of ordinary people in the bourgeois state. The distant and grandiose epic of antiquity, and also of medieval cavalry novels, is now lost in modernity and replaced by small everyday business.

⁶³Cf. *Hotho* 1823, 434/349.

⁶⁴Cf. *Libelt* 1828/1829b, 28 and *Heimann* 1828/1829, 49. See also Iannelli (2014c, 14).

⁶⁵Cf. *Kehler* 26, 150–151.

In all this, there is no inclination towards philosophy, like that seen in the previous pole (which doesn't mean that a novel like *Wilhelm Meister* doesn't have philosophical implications); all the attention of the literary artwork is directed towards the restitution of reality, to the faithful description of facts, characters and actions, as they appear. There is no attempt to get out of the art configuration of reference nor are there any particular attempts at experimentation. There is the desire to tell a story, as it could occur in a certain historical epoch and in a certain context, with great events in the background only and everyday life in the foreground.

The thesis of the end of art is interpreted here as the possibility of becoming something familiar, common and conventional, and, with respect to the end of literature, we already met this in part in Danto's consideration of a novel like Capote's *In Cold Blood*.

5 The End as a Constitutive Element of Literature

In this sense, we can find two competing and partly converging tensions that run through the Hegelian idea of the end of art and that can produce two different ways of interpreting the thesis within Hegel's own work. Philosophisation, which is mainly based on the general systematic framework and on the relationship with philosophy, is flanked and, in a certain sense, contrasted with that of everyday life, which instead highlights the loss of holiness and the social centrality of art at the historical-epochal level.

Especially in the romantic era—where there is a primacy to spirit over materiality, yet still the demand for external expression—literature leads fantasy, with all its modern accidentally, in two directions: it 'can mirror what is present to it, exactly as it is, just as readily as it can jumble the shapes of the external world and distort them grotesquely' (*Ästh. I*, 113–114/81). As ordinary or philosophical, one may say, translating Hegel's reasoning into our terms. Both readings can be traced back to Hegel and both find in literature a privileged place of tension—starting with the labels that Hegel gives them ('poetry' among the 'prose of scientific thought' and the 'prose of finitude and commonplace thinking'). They are

poles that are clearly in a dialectical relationship; they approach, reject and find forms of mediation between each other. Sometimes they coincide, as in the Hegelian case of the ugly, which is a distortion that transforms the previous form and content, but at the same time represents something ordinary, coming from everyday life. At the same time, however, they are also two poles that indicate two opposite directions, that of exasperated reformulation and that of the most common flatness.

The fact that literature is a privileged place for the end of art is mainly due to the particular role that this art has within the Hegelian conception. And it is a privileged place of expression of the end of art in general. Hegel places literature at the apex of the system of the arts, because it comes at the end of a process of spiritualisation and abandonment of material that found its most immediate realisation and expression in the medium of language used in an artistic way, namely a material that is at the same time immaterial. It does not seem out of place, therefore, after having gone through some significant Hegelian passages, to look beyond Hegel and reflect, at least partially and for a moment, on the very concept of literature, before taking into consideration some specific cases of contemporary literature and reaching conclusions.

The two poles, thus described, in fact seem to constitutively surround poetry (or literature) and hence seem to belong to it in a decisive way. These two poles seem to be both *inherently* present as two constitutive features of the way of being of literature that were likely present since its origins. This tells us that literature has within it the two possible alternatives that can make it go beyond literature, beyond itself. It has in itself at least two modes of its own end or, from another point of view, the way to its own end and the opposite that resists it. In this continuous tension between the two poles, literature never becomes something else, but finds in this persistent struggle an infinite field of possibilities that allow it to remain itself through the most turbulent changes. Literature, in this sense, does not meet its end in the same way that the other particular arts do. Literary works of art have within themselves elements capable of resisting an irreversible change in their status. At the same time, they also have elements which traverse changes in the history of art, producing a continuous renewal of it. Literature, among the arts, seems to be the art that most resists upheavals, because it has within itself, perhaps since forever, the seeds of

its end. In its figurative representation and linguistic dimension, there is something that is already beyond art, if art has to be understood in the Hegelian sense as a sensible medium that embodies a meaning. It has its own end in itself because, in its own constitution, the sensible medium exists in a way close to non-existence. The sensible component is present *only* in its evanescence; therefore, it loses its distinctive relevance *as sensible*, becoming in this way truly free (something that cannot be said of the other arts).

The opening assumption of this study was opposition to the claim of the 'transgenerical' character that Danto demanded for the thesis of the end of art, above all understood as philosophisation. We have seen here how this reading, that of philosophisation, certainly has a right to claim citizenship within the Hegelian apparatus, from which both the tradition of the end of art and the tradition of the end of literature originate. However, we have also found, as is always present in Hegel, a second way of understanding the end of art and therefore of literature, namely that of ordinariness. In a certain sense, this was present in Danto's view too, but in a more lateral and oblique respect compared to his canonical conception of the end of art. This second way of conceiving the thesis on the end, ordinariness, in many ways seems to be divergent and to oppose the first one of philosophisation. If the former describes a reflexive tension and the dissolution of the artwork into something different and unconventional, the latter does not look for exceptionality and experimentation, but tends towards realistic everyday life and, if we can speak in this case of the dissolution of the artwork, this dissolution moves towards the moderation and sobriety of the common world. They are therefore two divergent modes, two opposing tensions, which describe two possible ends of art. In other words, we have found, in Hegel, the end and its resistance, two poles which, in these terms, can exchange roles with each other.

Moreover, we have also seen how these two versions find their most complete expression and partly their origin in the specific art of literature and in its peculiarity. This diversity of literature, as described by Hegel, its exceptionality in relation to the other arts and, at the same time, its being a model for all the arts, allows literature to express the possibility of tending towards these two poles at the highest level as constitutive of its existence. It is here, in literature's capacity to have both poles in itself rather

than tending towards a univocal end, that we must look for the reason why literature, compared to arts such as the figurative arts, does not pass through an irreversible and one-sided end. Moving between one pole and another, between an end and its opposite, it resists merely ending, instead constantly reinventing itself to continue to still and always be itself.

There is one last issue, however, which we should address and which has already been mentioned in Chapter 1. According to the letter of Hegel's lectures, if poetry is the art that more than any other corresponds to the concept of art and in which its end is most radically manifest, the genre that corresponds most to what Hegel means by poetry and in which its end is most strongly expressed, so much so as to be structurally placed at the end of the lectures, is the drama, in its tragic version and even more in its comic one, that 'leads at the same time to the dissolution of art altogether' (*Ästh. III*, 572/1236). A treatment completely consistent with the Hegelian text should therefore focus on the genre of the drama, especially in the attempt to find the main example for the discussion of literature in general.⁶⁶ And undoubtedly, this is a possible path, which has been taken, also in reference to the literary production after Hegel's death.⁶⁷

The choice of interpretation that I consciously made in this book partly differs from the Hegelian argument and is aimed at deepening the genre of the novel. In Pippin's words, I tried to read the theme of literature in Hegel, *malgré lui* while considering his reflections *avant la lettre*.⁶⁸ The novel is not at the centre of his treatment of literature. On the contrary, as we will shortly see, its presence in the lectures on aesthetics is reductive and problematic. Nevertheless, his arguments about this genre have been and are particularly enlightening for subsequent criticism.

The reason for the choice of focusing on novel—a choice that requires some necessary reshaping and implies some partial updates of the Hegelian discourse—is due, first of all, to the centrality that the novel genre has

⁶⁶For instance, Kottman shows how a comparison between Hegel's *Aesthetics* and Prospero's last words in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is enlightening to understand the claim about art's pastness (Kottman 2018, esp. 272–275).

⁶⁷A Hegelian interpretation of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is present in Kohl (2005).

⁶⁸Cf. Pippin (2014, 3).

assumed in the contemporary conception of literature. However, this centrality is not based on a purely personal impression or the observation of a fact, but is justified and rooted intrinsically, philosophically, in the meaning and role that the novel has. In the previous chapter, it was seen that its history and determination are strongly intertwined with modernity. This connection is so strong that only for the novel has a specific discourse on its end developed in such a consistent and extended way. The discourse on the end has found in the novel a particularly meaningful perspective. On the basis of this, I intend to concentrate my attention on this genre, making the hermeneutic choice (again, not the only possible one) to consider it not as an interesting phenomenon on its own, but as a key epiphenomenon to understanding the relationship of literature as a whole with its end.

In order to make this interpretation even more well-grounded and explicit, and thus reach some conclusions, in the next chapter I will try to apply this interpretative outline to two phenomena of contemporary literature: so-called postmodern literature, assumed as a contemporary literary version of the end as philosophisation, and the so-called nonfiction novel, understood as a literary account of the end as ordinariness. In this way, I will show how contemporary literature, unlike other arts such as the figurative arts, can resist the claim of the 'transgenerical' character of the end. Before this, in the following pages, I will focus more in particular on the genre of the novel, because in it the peculiarity with which the end works in literature, on the one hand as philosophisation and on the other as ordinariness, appears more evident. The novel, in fact, is the genre of modernity and, just as the end of art and literature manifest the contradictions of modernity as a discourse, so in the novel the end assumes its most evident and marked characteristics. For this reason, prior to the application of this interpretative model of the end to contemporary literature, it is useful to briefly consider the Hegelian conception of the novel.

6 Hegel and the Philosophy of the Novel

The relationship between Hegel and the novel is a story of paradoxes. At the historical-philosophical level, there is the disproportion between the

extent of the actual treatment of the topic in Hegel's work and the breadth of its influence in the almost two centuries that followed. From the more theoretical-literary point of view, there is a tension in the very object of investigation, i.e. the novel, and the dimension Hegel attributes to it.

In the first place, in fact, one could provocatively ask whether there is an actual Hegelian theory of the novel: against the truly extraordinary influence of what we can consider Hegel's theory of the novel and of the famous formula of the novel as the 'modern epic' or 'modern bourgeois epic', the passages in which he deals with the novel as such and analyses it extensively from a theoretical point of view are very few. In general, it can be said that an extended and in-depth thematisation of the novel in Hegel's *Lectures* is missing.

If we read the long version published by Hotho, after a long chapter on epic poetry, the lines dedicated to a proper consideration of the novel scarcely reach even a page in the German text; even more disappointing, in this regard, are the manuscripts of the students' notebooks, where the references are further reduced. With respect to this scarcity of references or extensive discussion of the subject, critics have referred to Hegel's theory of the novel as 'the unconscious in the whole Hegelian aesthetics' (Weiss 2013, 76).⁶⁹ The profile of Hegel's theory of the novel is a figure to be recomposed, reconstructed and developed starting from the general framework of his philosophy of art, from the premises of his long analysis of the epic and from the few, but significant, hints of the passages in which Hegel seems to be more explicit.⁷⁰

To a certain extent—and apart from the effectiveness of Hegel's view on the novel—it can be said that the success of the Hegelian theory of

⁶⁹Discussing the possibility of finding within Hegel's *Phenomenology* a theory of the novel in the transition from the heroic-antique to the prosaic-bourgeois period, the Marxist Lukács spoke of 'an "esoteric theory" of the novel' (Lukács 1981, 24–25). More recently, Speight has argued: '[d]espite the profusion of novelistic literature in his own time and his own significant appropriation of it for the limning of essential moments of the development of the world-historical spirit, Hegel's official *Aesthetics* hardly presents what one could claim to be an especially worked-out theory of the novel' (Speight 2010, 23).

⁷⁰While noting the need for a reconstructive operation, Hebing states that 'as soon as one takes into account, however, that access to Hegel's theory of the modern novel can only be found if one examines its relationship to the theory of the epic, the romantic art form, and the prosaic world condition, it becomes clear that the theory of the novel appears marginal only at first glance' (Hebing 2009, 43).

the novel (or of what can be derived from Hegel on the novel) is largely due to the success of the novel itself. Hegel, through few interpretative moves, certainly grasped in a very subtle way some decisive features of the genre, but the extraordinary centrality that this interpretation had is largely explained by the success of its object of analysis, which was making its way in that period and would become the dominant genre in the almost two centuries after the Hegelian diagnosis, enabling a few lines that were already bright shine in an impressive way.

The reprises and developments since Hegel have been several and different. One of the texts that has been particularly influential is young György Lukács' *Theory of the Novel*, so much so that—always to remain on the crest of the paradox—one could indicate that work when answering the question of whether or not there is a Hegelian theory of the novel. In fact, Lukács, even in the decades following the 1920 publication, for instance in the 1962 *Preface*, says how, especially in the first general part, his work is 'essentially determined by Hegel' (Lukács 1971, 9/15), considered however in a heterodox way and supplemented by other contributions, such as Schiller, Goethe, Schelling and Solger. Actually, Lukács' *Theory of the Novel* accords with the general coordinates on the novel indicated by Hegel's philosophy of art. It can be read as a more extensive re-elaboration, firstly from a theoretical point of view and secondly from a literary-critical point of view, of Hegel's considerations.⁷¹ And he is not the only one—as we know—to refer to Hegel as a reference among others or as a real model, especially in the famous formula of the novel as the 'modern bourgeois epic'. To skip to more recent years, in Franco Moretti's *The Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez* the Hegelian formulation opens the book with its paradoxical character and in opposition to Goethe (Moretti 1994, 11–13/11–14). Or again, the analysis of a writer like Claudio Magris is based on Hegel when he intends to reiterate the inseparability between the novel and modern life (Magris 2001). Or, finally, to really get to the present day in this not at all exhaustive overview, the literary theorist Guido Mazzoni also points out that the 'Hegelian ideas on the novel [have] profoundly influenced the criticism of the twentieth century'

⁷¹ For an in-depth comparison between the Hegelian theory of the novel and that of Lukács, also in later texts such as his *Balzac-Studien*, see, in addition to Hebing (2009), Speight (2010), and James (2009, 89–111).

(Mazzoni 2011, 242). In short, Hegel's *Aesthetics* consistently appears in analyses on the novel throughout the twentieth century until today and is quoted substantially as a starting point, an original analysis, a founding myth for criticism, whose omnipresence is constantly emphasised and whose presence cannot be done without (Fusillo 2002).

Despite this, the analysis of the novel in Hegel's work doesn't seem to have the decisive relevance that it later assumed. One element in support of this feeling is that Hegel pays the same attention or perhaps more to the genre of the idyll, that is, to that epic sub-genre of a predominantly rural or pastoral character, idealising and irenic, which concerns a 'private condition' and therefore, although epic, also tends towards the lyrical; a genre that had in antiquity its model in Theocritus' poetry and in Hegel's time was represented by Goethe's *Hermann and Dorothea* and Johann Heinrich Voss's *Luise*. In Hegel's interpretation, this literary form is the precursor of the novel and, with a sometimes greater authority, represents for him one of the possible realisations of epic poetry in modernity (*Hotho* 1823, 501/427–428). However, in the decades of a transforming society that was about to forcefully experience the effects of the industrial revolution, only the modern bourgeois epic was destined to assume an ever greater centrality, not the pacified agricultural framework of idyll. This is probably what Hegel sensed, without making it explicit, when he placed the novel (if present) as the last and ultimate result of epic poetry.

In any case, despite the limited space he dedicates to its thematisation, Hegel is fully aware of the growing success of the genre of the novel and, not by chance, his work is literally dotted with references to it. He does not deal extensively with a theory of it, but often quotes novels, novelists or characters from novels in order to dwell on something else, that is, to clarify concepts outside the field of the philosophy of art and not to talk about the genre of the novel itself: for instance, he cites the philosophical novels *Allwill* and *Woldemar* in *Faith and Knowledge* when he speaks of Jacobi (*GuW*, 382–383); in the *Encyclopaedia*, he mentions Goethe's *Werther* in the addition to paragraph 448, while in the annotation to paragraph 549 he speaks of the 'famous [novels] of W. Scott', presented as a typical phenomenon of modernity in its representation of history; Rousseau's pedagogical novel *Émile* is quoted in the addition to § 126 of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (*GPR*, 111–112), whereas in the addition to § 164

he speaks of the scandalous Schlegelian novel *Lucinde* (*GPR*, 147–148); he extensively dwells on Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel—author among other things of the singular biographical novel *Lebensläufe nach aufsteigender Linie*—in his review of the writings of Johann Georg Hamann (*Hamann-Rez.*, esp. 164ff.), and, however briefly and critically, Hegel also considers from a philosophical-artistic point of view the novels that were decisive for the first romantic authors such as Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and, again, Schlegel’s *Lucinde* in the review of Solger’s posthumous writings and correspondence (*Solger-Rez.*, 84).⁷²

Moreover, from a biographical point of view, we know that his relationship with the genre has always been constant. The young Hegel was an avid reader of novels, as we can see from the earliest documents. He studied by filling in sheets on the header of which was the title and sub-title of the section—that Rosenkranz calls ‘article’—and we can read that, under the title ‘Aesthetics’, the young Hegel had grouped the sub-titles ‘Epic’, ‘Didactic poem’ and also ‘Novel’ and, under this last label, we can find the most popular authors of the time: Rammler, Dusch, Lessing, Wieland, Engel and Eberhard (Rosenkranz 1963, 13). From the pages of the youth’s notebooks, we read in a note of 1787 that he just cannot stop reading *Sophies Reise von Memel nach Sachsen*, a picaresque and romance novel by Johann Timotheus Hermes, which at the time was widespread and translated into several languages (*FS*, 26). And if we instead move to the mature Hegel’s documents and consult the list of titles of his private library in Berlin, in the section ‘Neue Literatur und Poesie, Archeologie und Kunst’, the group of novels, although not a majority, is rather well nourished with many of the names already mentioned and other classics fundamental to understanding the Hegelian conception of the novel (*Bibliothek*, 639–959). Hegel was definitely not blind to the growing importance that the novel was acquiring. This is inevitable considering the centrality that this genre already had at that time, for example, among the first Romantics, to whom Hegel was strongly opposed but that he knew very well.⁷³

⁷²Cf. Hebing (2009, 63).

⁷³About Hegel and the first romantics on the topic of the novel, see Stocker (2007) and Stocker (2018, 70–76). On the centrality of the novel in Romanticism, cf. D’Angelo (2019, 327–345).

Yet Hegel, if and when he talks about the novel, talks about it for one or a few paragraphs, and, at this point, one may also wonder why he dedicates such limited space to it. It does not seem that the answer is to be found in the now almost completely buried thesis of Hegel as a classicist who has eyes only for the Greece of the fifth century and underestimates his own contemporaneity. At the same time, it seems too tendentious to think that the novel is not considered by Hegel because it was too compromised by being the most representative genre for the first romantics.

Probably, the most plausible answer or an answer that will allow me to introduce his conception of the novel is that, for Hegel, the novel is an inherently problematic genre and, as such, it could not have been easily codifiable at the time (in any case, this would be a response to the limited scope of Hegel's discussion of the novel, not to the results that this brief reflection achieves). For Hegel, the novel expresses the real, realised, *wirklich*, possibility of an impossibility; it represents the overwhelming victory of an inevitably losing and, at the very least, already defeated dimension. In this sense, the novel, essentially, can be read as one of the most significant examples of the thesis on the end of literature in the interpretation proposed above. Moreover, for the centrality it has had in the last two centuries and the aporetic dimension that Hegel already attributes to it, the novel puts the question of modernity in all its power on the table. In the paradoxical condition that can be deduced from the Hegelian description of the novel, the paradoxical condition of literature in general emerges in all its strength. Analysing the few lines that Hegel dedicates to it, developing and unravelling the theory that innervates his considerations, all this can tell us something about this genre, literature, art in general and the time that has produced them.

First of all, it is important to contextualise Hegel's diagnosis of the novel within the framework of his lectures. In Hotho's printed version and in the different student manuscripts, Hegel includes the genre of the modern novel mainly in two places: on the one hand, in the last passages of romantic art and, on the other, at the end of the treatment of epic poetry, condensing also structurally what the formula of the 'modern epos' describes. That is, he places it either at the end of his epochal reconstruction of the art forms (that is, when he analyses symbolic, classical and romantic art forms) or in the conclusion of the discussion of the first of the three

main literary genres (along with lyrical poetry and drama) in the section on the particular arts.

More specifically, in Hegel's classification, the novel is one of the sub-genres of epic poetry, along with the idyll, the didactic poem, the romance and the ballad. It is presented as a kind of imperfect version of the genre, if compared to the actual epos. This constitutive partiality with regard to the original genre of reference, however, does not make it a totally marginal artistic product. On the contrary, probably because it reflects the era in which it conquered the centre of the scene, Hegel notes how, within the national and social life of the time, 'there is opened up in the domain of epic an unlimited field' (*Ästh. III*, 415/1110) for a genre such as the novel (together with the short story and the novella). After all, in one of the versions of the famous formula that identifies the novel, the 'modern epos' is '*our* modern epos' (my emphasis), that is it identifies an entire community, a nation and historical period. This element, which is in perfect harmony with the epic tradition, is not ignored by Hegel.

In order to understand the Hegelian conception of the novel, the first step to take is to realise that, behind it, there is all the great and detailed analysis of the epic genre as a whole and in its original Greek version. If the second genre, lyrical poetry, is the genre of subjectivity and drama, the third one is that of mediation between subject and object, then the first genre of epic poetry represents the genre of the object. In general, epic poetry brings into play the world as represented outwardly: it presents the objective content, the matter as it is, 'the object as object, the breadth of circumstances, the entire object in its existence' (*Hotho 1823*, 494/417).

The epic genre expresses a compact, unitary whole; in it, the represented world is not yet crossed by the fracture that will be produced by the emergence of the modern subject. Epic poetry presents its content as an accomplished world: in the original unity between the individual and the world, inner purposes and external events, the will of the characters and the necessity of context, actions and circumstances, a direct relationship is maintained that is without mediation. The world of epic poetry is vast: the variety of elements is nevertheless harmonious, 'proceeds freely of its own accord' (*Hotho 1823*, 493/416) without irreversible traumas or incurable wounds. It is a world that simply happens and where this happening is not produced by the individual, but is a mere event, 'the entirety

of a happening' (*Hotho* 1823, 496/420). This is so much the case that the actions of the characters, precisely because they are in an immediate correspondence with external circumstances, cannot be considered real actions or products of the interiority of the individual who moves in autonomy and self-awareness: epic poetry 'has for its object a happening in its overall development and breath; it represents the action within its world' (*Hotho* 1823, 494–495/418). The deeds of epic characters, like what surrounds them, are also events, things that happen.

What we can define as individual actions in a broad sense is the product of the world that produced them, which emerges consistently with the totality in which they are located and develop. In fact, it is the era of heroes that best suits the epic genre, because there the ethical life and the relationships that run through it are expressed in a unity: the individual is dependent upon the necessity of the whole that generates her; she is a one and only element with the thing; she is a particular moment of the inevitability that dominates everything. For this reason, destiny belongs not to drama, but to epic poetry: in the drama, the subject presents herself in her autonomous individuality and intends to determine what surrounds her; in epic poetry, instead, each character is determined from the beginning with respect to what will be of her (*Hotho* 1823, 495–496/419).

In epic poetry, the objective content of an outwardly unfolded world is expressed. An entire community recognises itself as a single entity. Dealing with this genre means that one can listen to the original spirit of a community, and precisely because epic poetry is the genre that places itself totally on the side of the object, of the world, the poet—in this case, aoidoi and rhapsodes—retracts, does not appear. The subjective level is in the background and, for this reason, 'the great epic style consists in the work's seeming to be its own minstrel and appearing independently without having any author to conduct it or be at its head' (*Ästh. II*, 336/1049).

The reference model for the epic genre is clearly the Homeric poems and the society described therein. In the *Iliad*, the general condition is constituted by the war, where 'act of the will and the working of chance are counterbalanced' (*Hotho* 1823, 497/421), the heroes have the precise role that is assigned to them (Agamemnon is the king over the kings; Achilles, one of them), and the 'whole state of affairs is established in advance' (*Hotho* 1823, 498/422), it is something already given. The epos

represents the moral constitution of a people, it is its Bible, it provides its ethical and social premises (*Hotho* 1823, 498/423). From this perspective, epic poetry is the original genre and is constitutive of a people, where the human being is still involved in a primordial and naïve whole and, feeling an integral part of it, contributes consistently to its dynamics. Nothing is external, residual for the human being. There is no law; everything she does is carried on the same, immediate wavelength as the order of things in the world. Agamemnon does not give orders, but consults with the other kings (*Hotho* 1823, 498/423): there is no institution that legally requires something to be done, but everything develops accordingly. The second nature of the epic condition could be said to coincide almost with the first: epic poetry does not know the fractures of prose.

In this way, a real epos, in the modern world, does not seem to be possible and it is here that the paradoxical dimension of the novel begins to emerge. The social and historical conditions have changed, no longer coinciding with the parameters of the epic world. Ethical life has become institutionalised; it has become law and therefore not immediately coincident with and external to the human being. The human being, for her part, is becoming singularised into a self-aware subject, simultaneously free and alone in a world that no longer belongs to her, a world that she no longer feels is her own. There is the world on one side and the individual on the other: everything has split.⁷⁴ And the human being is called upon the unrealizable task of trying, with all the forces that are her own (and only those), to regain this world, to make it her own again—and if not to break down the wall that now separates her irretrievably from it, at least to scratch it.⁷⁵

⁷⁴The mature Lukács pointed out that: 'Hegel was the first who on the one hand recognised the new genre-properties of the modern novel, its relation to the peculiarities of bourgeois society and on the other hand, however, also recognised that this new art-genre is essentially nothing other than the revival of the old epic under the fundamentally changed conditions of bourgeois society' (Lukács 1969, 127/107).

⁷⁵In this situation and emphasising the historical and pedagogical aspect of the novel in relation to the society it represents and from which it derived, Mikhail Bakhtin writes: '[a] man must educate or re-educate himself for life in a world that is, from his point of view, enormous and foreign; he must make it his own, domesticate it. In Hegel's definition, the novel must educate man for life in bourgeois society. This educative process is connected with a severing of all previous ties with the idyllic, that is, it has to do with man's *expatriation*. Here the process of a man's re-education

In this regard, Hegel discusses the difference between original epic poetry, the epos of the ancient era at the basis of the collective consciousness of a community and the epic poetry artificially composed at a later time in modernity: in the case of the original epos, the historical-cultural context in which the poems arise is still in complete harmony with what is being narrated; objective totality is still possible. In the second case, there is a fracture between reality and poetry, a lack of harmony between the historical period and the narrative. Whereas Homer's mythology is still something 'poetic' that comes close to reality, something that sounds coherent with the world in which it is inserted and with who listens to the narration, already in Virgil the insertion of mythological elements is an entirely intellectual and 'prosaic' operation, something artificial, an invention of the poet that is perceived as such and not as a linear consequence that derives from the material treated and the context that produced it (*Hotho* 1823, 499–500/424–425). And this is true, all the more so, with the attempts to produce a proper epic poem in times closer to those of Hegel, like Klopstock's *Messiah*, in which one perceives how the story of Christ fits into a context that is not his own, that of the eighteenth century. For these reasons, Hegel concludes: there 'can be epic poems only in a certain time period. Modern times cannot have any' (*Hotho* 1823, 500/426).

At this point, we can understand how problematic the combination between 'epic' and 'modernity' is, which recurs in the formula that describes the novel. In it, two opposing and contradictory tendencies are concentrated: on the one hand, the static, solid, total objectivity of the world that imposes itself as it is, proper to the epos; on the other hand, modernity, with all its fractures and unfolded subjectivity, crossed by freedom and negativity, rationality and disruptive individuality. There is, therefore, in the genre of the novel a double impulse: on the one side, the tendency towards a unitary totality, which reveals itself to be little more than a nostalgia or an attempt devoted to failure; on the other, the tendency towards particularisation, to the subject who is produced by the

is interwoven with the process of society's breakdown and reconstruction, that is, with historical process' (Bakhtin 1981, 234).

splitting of everything and who produces splits, internal conflicts, disharmonies and dissolutions. The notorious passage from Hotho's printed version describes in fact the novel in the following terms:

But it is quite different with the novel [*Roman*], the modern bourgeois [*bürgerlichen*] epic. Here we have completely before us again the wealth and many-sidedness of interests, situations, characters, relations involved in life, the wide background of a whole world, as well as the epic portrayal of events. But what is missing is the *primitive* poetic general situation out of which the epic proper proceeds. A novel in the modern sense of the word presupposes a world already prosaically ordered; then, on this ground and within its own sphere whether in connection with the liveliness of events or with individuals and their fate, it regains for poetry the right it had lost, so far as this is possible in view of that presupposition. (*Ästh. III*, 392–393/1092, modified transl.)

The novel re-proposes the epic principle in a context completely changed from the one in which it finds its fullest meaning.⁷⁶ All the intentions and claims of the ancient epic are borrowed. The multiplicity and variety of the aspects it deals with, the total wholeness of the world it proposes, change. And this because the background in which these instances find themselves is no longer the same, the conditions of possibility that make them exist have altered. The context in which the novel arises and which constitutes the premise and framework for the representation of the novel is no longer the poetic one of the Homeric heroes' world. Everything has been transformed in the prose of the world, in the daily life of the individual human being, who looks at the particularities of things, at her own specific subjectivity. The characters of the novel journey in a world that is now foreign to them, that they no longer feels as their own. They clash with the institutional dynamics of ethical life and of right in general. As we read in the lectures of 1826:

[Our] modern epic [is] the novel [*Roman*]. The hero of a novel cannot be the hero of an epic, because in the Romantic [*im Romantischen*] the

⁷⁶With Lukács: 'The epic gives form to a totality of life that is rounded from within; the novel seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life' (Lukács 1971, 51/60).

ethical [*das Sittliche*] and the juridical [*das Rechtliche*] have become fixed relations, the individual as such has only particularity in this fixed world, its education, and [the aspiration] to meet it, to become in accordance [with] it. What is left to him to do is his own subjectivity. (*Kehler 1826*, 217)

It is the reality of the above-mentioned *Humanus* in all its richness, multiformity and endless particularity. The human being is no longer a hero; she is a common individual who places all her expectations, desires and anxieties in a world that does not immediately consider her an integrated part of it. This world abandons her to her cold solitude, and she must prove her individual ability to face challenges. This world is foreign to her, but she is forced to deal with it. She does not recognise this world, and it, in turn, does not recognise her. Yet within this world, she has infinite potential for accomplishment. And it is a world where the picture of reality for the first time opens up so broadly to the point of bringing to the main scene what was previously not considered with due dignity or belonged only to more lateral genres. This would will resonate, at least in part, with Auerbach's famous words on the difference between modern, where everyday life is taken seriously, and ancient realism, where 'there could be no serious literary treatment of everyday occupations and social classes – merchants, artisans, peasants, slaves – of everyday scenes and places – home, shop, field, store – of everyday customs and institutions – marriage, children, work, earning a living – in short, of the people and its life' (Auerbach 2015, 35/31).⁷⁷

⁷⁷For Auerbach, the problem is that in ancient times, the division of styles relegated daily life to the sphere of comedy, jokes and moralism (or, shortly afterwards, to a religious sphere such as the Christian one), while only in modern times does daily life assume a seriousness and a tragedy that was previously precluded. For recent discussions of Auerbach's position with respect to the novel, see Mazzoni (2011, 114–118, 237–244) and Stocker (2018, 175–179). However, if it is true that in Auerbach the Hegelian motives and, more generally, a philosophical-historical approach in considering the development of literature return in a consistent and conscious way (cf. Zakai 2015), it is also true that there are differences. In this case, for example, for Auerbach, daily life emerges when seriousness and tragedy have taken away the comic dimension with which they were taken into account in ancient times, while for Hegel the comic dimension is just as fundamental as the tragic, even in modernity and also in the discovery of everyday life. Think here, for instance, of the centrality of Cervantes's comic function for Hegel in contrast to Auerbach's more suspicious tone regarding Cervantes's ability to identify the historical problems of his work. For a discussion of the two positions on Cervantes, see Brandalise (2009, 359–361).

On this background, the main subject of the novel, for Hegel, becomes the collision between the ‘poetry of the heart’, that is the sincere (and sometimes naïve) tendency of the particular subject towards what she most desires, and the plurality present in the ‘prose of the world’, which stands between the individual and the realisation of what she wants or tries to do. Starting from this kind of contrast, dynamics are triggered that lead to tragic or comic outcomes and that, at best, lead the individual to recognise herself in what she previously believed to be something other than herself. The characters of the novel interact with this world, succeeding in the real endeavour to replace the prose of the world, which they find from the beginning as a fact, with their own version of the prose of the world—a version filled with all the expectations and desires that this individuality carries with it. In so doing, the novel, a product of the prosaic dimension, can come closer to something poetic:

Consequently one of the commonest, and, for novel, most appropriate, collisions is the conflict between the poetry of the heart and the opposing prose of circumstances and the accidents of external situations; this is a conflict resolved whether comically or tragically, or alternatively it is settled either (i) when the characters originally opposed to the usual order of things learn to recognise in it what is substantive and really genuine, when they are reconciled with their circumstances and effective in them, or (ii) when the prosaic shape of what they do and achieve is stripped away, and therefore what they had before them as prose has its place taken by a reality akin and friendly to beauty and art (*Ästh. III*, 392–393/1092–1093).

The novel therefore expresses, as constitutive of the essence of this genre, a contrast between the totality of the world, an epic totality and a modern autonomous subject who, extraneous to this totality, no longer recognises herself in it and no longer participates in it in an immediate, sympathetic way. Nonetheless, she can intervene into it with the means proper to the human, without finding extraordinary solutions and without completely distorting things, instead trying to find what is substantive in the world and, in so doing, also searching for what can still bring out beauty.

The main character of the novel is a knight in the world of the everyday life. As said, it is Wilhelm Meister who sets out on an adventure in the world, following a path of formation and growth, of self-recognition in the

world. He undertakes this long journey by pursuing completely ordinary goals and facing the cold and prosaic obstacles of the modern world. In this sense, the novel, as the last offshoot of the romantic art form (in the epochal sense), is a correction of the fantastic, a correction of the extraordinary and imaginary world of chivalry.⁷⁸

Not by chance, one of the typical examples for Hegel is also *Don Quixote*, which marks the end of chivalry and the advent of the novel. Cervantes' character comically dissolves the institution of chivalry, crossing at his expense the contradiction between the epic world of the knight's madness and the modernity that is no longer able to accommodate him. The tensions and the results of Cervantes' novel are many and, certainly, are all marked by the advent of the prosaic. It is a prosaic that is very close to the 'prose of everyday life', because it is made up of the countless episodes and encounters, situations and figures, that have their origins in the context of an impending modern world in which it comes to expression. By demeaning everything that the hidalgo of La Mancha would like to personify through the ridiculous contrast with ordinary reality, the prosaic circumstances of everyday life act as desecrating elements with respect to the greatness and splendor of a world that no longer exists (*Kehler* 1826, 150). At the same time, *Don Quixote* retains a character of dissolution and it is with an operation of reflection on the very form and content of the knightly poem and on the novel that Cervantes (comically) dismisses chivalry. There seems therefore also to be a contribution to what we have seen as the 'prose of thought', a prose of subjectivity that reflects on the work of art and dissolves it, changing the ways in which it had previously presented itself.⁷⁹

In this regard, Laurence Sterne's already-mentioned *Tristram Shandy* takes this reflective character of the dissolution of an artwork to its extreme consequences. In this case, the main character, who is also the narrator of the story, presents an artwork which, through a reflection on its own story, is also a reflection on the representation of its story and on the very concept of the novel and literary artwork. Through the innovative use of flashbacks

⁷⁸Cf. *Griesheim* 1826, 761.

⁷⁹For a recent discussion of the Hegelian interpretation of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, see Hebing (2015a, 402–407).

and flash-forwards, the insertion of narratives into narratives, the introduction of extra-alphabetic graphic symbols or drawings to describe the course of the story, the chapters of a single sentence or a little more, the interruption of the narration through empty pages and the destruction of a plot that, in the end, will be discovered to have covered only one day of the main character's life, *Tristram Shandy* presents itself, at the same time, as an artwork and the cerebral attempt to deconstruct and almost destroy itself. *Shandy* is a novel that, through its continuous self-rethinking, brings out both the prosaic, often ordinary vitality of advancing modernity and its limits (in family relationships between father and mother, in the relationship with the scientific progress represented by the choice between the village midwife and the obstetrician, in the emergence of novelties in the military field embodied in uncle Toby who, now unable to participate in the battles, takes everything as a serious game). Above all, what emerges is the power—all modern—of the literary genre in question. It shows itself as a novel that, remaining a novel, tries to go beyond the novel.

In summary, if an extended and developed theory of the novel is not present in Hegel, there are certainly some formulations and passages that, from the point of view of an effective diagnosis and subsequent developments, have proven particularly enlightening. There is a historical-artistic, philosophical-historical, epochal and literary theory context that takes shape substantially in the treatment of the epic and its conflict with modernity and then in relation to the end of art and the end of literature.

If the novel has become, at the time when Hegel held his lectures and in the following years up until today, the genre of modernity, it is due to the fact that it has been able to embody the challenges and limits of modernity. The novel is at the heart of modernity, embodies it and, as Kundera's analysis reminds us, has contributed to its foundations, carrying within itself the contradictions of the modern era, which it expresses in the contents of what is represented in it and in the configurations that this representation assumes. As we have seen, the discourse on the end of art and the end of literature speaks of modernity; they are discourses on modernity, because in them the tensions of an epochal passage of that kind come to the surface. In this sense, then, because the impulse that moves the elaboration of this genre is the same that innervates the thesis on the end, the novel becomes a privileged point of view on which to test the discourse

on the end of art and literature. The problematic character of Hegel's understanding of the novel as 'modern epos' confirms this juxtaposition, and in the novel, we are able to trace those two modalities of the end that emerged from the interpretation of the Hegelian thesis. Moreover, in the novel, the prose of thought and the prose of everyday life, the tension towards philosophisation, as reflection and rethinking of the artwork, and the tension towards ordinariness, as movement of the artwork towards everyday life, seem to be constitutive or seem to express with greater clarity than with other literary genres some elements that are probably typical of literature in general. The impulse of subjectivity in modernity to reflect on the work of art and the epic opens it onto a modern world of daily life that exhibits the dichotomy between the poles of philosophisation and ordinariness. In this sense, literature, in its example of the novel, resists the transgeneric demand for an end as an irreversible and definitive fracture, moving constantly and constitutively between these two poles and continuously reinventing itself in new ways that allow it to become something else by itself, always remaining itself. This resistance to the end becomes evident with the transition to modernity, which discovers its best interpreter in the novel, finding its assumptions in the exceptional character of literature in the latter's artistic use of the medium of language. For this reason, the resistance that is expressed to the highest degree in modernity with the novel seems to be constitutive not only of a particular, albeit decisive, epochal passage, but to be proper to literature as such and since forever.

Starting with this understanding of the end of art and literature in Hegel and supporting the thesis of a resistance of literature to its end, the next chapter will be devoted to the interpretation of some central phenomena in contemporary literary production. Its aim will be to further investigate the thesis through different artistic material, especially the contemporary novel, and provide a possible key to the interpretation of the Hegelian matrix for contemporary literature, showing once again the relevance of this thought for the present.

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5

The Contemporary Novel and the End of Literature

1 Theory and Practice

Literature is a complex phenomenon and, as such, it needs multiple points of view to be comprehended adequately. As we have seen in the second chapter, literature is a phenomenon whose philosophical analysis requires taking into consideration a diversified plurality of approaches, at least one of which is ontological and one historical (not to mention other levels which would benefit philosophical reflection on literature, such as for instance the sociological one). In any case, if one intends to make a theory or philosophy of literature, then literature must be present. The philosophy of literature is one of the ‘philosophies of _____’ (Lamarque 2009, 4), that is, the philosophy of something that constitutes its particular field of analysis. For this reason, it is necessary, at least at a certain point in the theoretical reasoning, that something emerges in its concreteness. In fact, the theoretical view of a subject such as literature must be accompanied by a practice of analysis carried out on concrete objects of study, in first place because it is a question of confirming what has been said and of legitimising the discourse produced. Secondly, because only in this way do theoretical analyses not remain empty and abstract patterns of thought

that, for example, could be applied to other fields of investigation without distinction.

This chapter will thus be devoted to deepening and testing the way literature faces its end; it applies the theory developed to the practice of analysing concrete texts. This will be carried out starting from the interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of art, set out in the previous chapter. Obviously, this will not be a strictly philological development of Hegelian theory (if it makes any sense to think in these terms, many of the literary works of art that will be considered here would not have attracted Hegel's attention and much less would he have liked them). What I will try to do is to make some of the conceptual nodes actually present in Hegel's thought interact with the world of contemporary literary production, in the attempt to develop a reflection on literature that, starting with a re-elaboration of Hegel, may also be significant for our time.

We have seen how in Hegel 'poetry', in the sense of literature, in the moment of its end finds itself having to deal, on the one hand, with the 'prose of thought', or the tendency of literature towards philosophy, and, on the other hand, with the 'prose of the world' or 'prose of everyday life', or the tendency, in some ways opposite to the first, towards ordinariness. In a nutshell, it will be a question of making a scheme of this kind interact with contemporary literary production. With the support of the latest positions in literary theory and criticism, the first pole will be identified as what can be called postmodern literature and that in recent years has taken the name of 'literature of excess' or 'maximalist literature', just to cite a few of its different names (Sect. 2); the second pole, on the other hand, will be identified as the so-called nonfiction novel, that is, that kind of literature which, taking the realist attitude to its extreme consequences, tries to restore reality as it is, almost as if it were not part of an artistically reworked context (Sect. 3). Since the attempt here is not to identify well-defined genres, but to bring out—one could say, in a Hegelian way—the rationality of reality, the two poles are to be understood as extremes of a field of tension within which a multiplicity of variants is expressed. These variants are now influenced by the first pole and now by the second, in an infinite interweaving of oppositions, approaches, superimpositions, dialectical exchanges, which constitute the literary field. In this tension, namely in the impossibility of literature to transform itself definitively

into something else, completely embracing one or the other pole, rests the capacity of literature to resist its end. This resistance is represented by its movement from one pole to another, in a continuous reorganisation and reformulation of itself, which allows it to remain always itself and not turn into something other. For this reason, the chapter will conclude with the analysis of cases that have qualities that can be traced back to both poles and that are placed, for this reason, between the two extremes (Sect. 4).

In the previous chapter, we have already given reason for the fact that in this study, starting from a theoretical context of Hegelian derivation, a choice is made at a certain point that departs from the textual and conceptual coherence of Hegel's philosophy of art. Instead of following Hegel in identifying drama, that is, tragedy or, even more, comedy, as a genre in which the end of literature is accomplished to the highest degree, the investigation centres on the genre of the novel. The concrete examples and theories about literature that will be found in this chapter are taken in their entirety from the scope of the novel (or short story). As said, this choice is due not only to reasons of space, but also to the belief that in the novel literature expresses to the maximum extent the way in which it comes to terms with its end. In fact, we have seen, on the one side, how the novel, in terms of the epic of modernity, already in Hegel expresses a paradoxical situation that explodes the contradictions of the circumstance of literary art in modernity and, on the other, how, here beyond Hegel, this paradoxical character has produced a specific tradition, within the more general ones on art and literature, concerning the end of the novel. The specificity of literature with respect to the other arts, almost two centuries after Hegel's death, seems to have unfolded to the fullest extent in the novel, in an outcome subsequent to Hegel and not expected by him (or not expected in these proportions). The focus will be on this specific genre, but the basic belief is that this genre represents only the best position from which to look at the phenomenon of the relationship of literature with its end today. What in general will be said about the novel is intended as valid, albeit to different degrees (think of poetry or theatre), for literature in general. Through the analysis of the novel, then, I will try to understand how literature generally deals with its end and what happens, if one can say so, after its possible end.

2 Novel and Philosophisation

When Hegel speaks of the ‘prose of thought’, he indicates a shift that leads poetry towards a ridge that can modify its connotations to the point of making it something different from what it is, that is, the scientific language of philosophy. Systematically, poetry, the last outpost of art before the forms of absolute knowing of religion and philosophy, has within itself the elements that lead it to dissolve as such and transform itself into something else. It is like a germ that the organism of poetry seems to have—maybe from the beginning—in itself, in its constituent organs, that is, in the word that it elaborates artistically or, in Hegel’s more technical language, in figurative representations. It is a germ that, especially in modernity, develops limbs. Of course, in the modern world, there is obviously no nullification of poetry (and art) as such. The advancement of the prose of thought does not cancel poetry. Rather, it gives poetry an awareness that the overbearing emergence of human subjectivity accompanied by a growing rationalisation, risks transporting it to dimensions that it is unable, as poetry and as art, to manage and that are proper to other forms of spirit, namely religion and, above all, philosophy.¹ It is not, therefore, a change capable of decreeing its cessation, but the signal that indicates a tendency or risk.

If we translate this conception to the novel that came after the historical Hegel, it is a tendency that leads the novel to look for a way out of itself and, at the same time, to find a new, sometimes unexpected, attire. It is a way of reacting that this genre has, especially in competition with other artistic contemporary forms (first photography, then cinema, then popular music, then the web) and the distractions of a time that no longer sees it at the centre of attention. It is a propensity for experimentation through which the novel reflects on its own status, on its ‘classic’ (in the broad and

¹ Here, the side of philosophy is emphasised with respect to that of religion because it refers to the readings of the end of art which result in its philosophisation; that is, it assumes this discourse in order to integrate it and thus, in part, to criticise it. It must be remembered, however, that this kind of reading is not entirely faithful to the Hegelian text, because not only does it elide one of the three forms of absolute spirit, but also because it understands these three forms hierarchically and diachronically, without taking into account the dialectical relationship that concerns them as different ways of expressing the same content.

not strictly Hegelian sense) dynamics. It tries to find new ways to expand beyond borders that are now perceived as too binding.

As we saw at the beginning, Danto already noticed this trend in a large part of contemporary literature. In a brief passage in *Philosophizing Literature*, he hypothesises that a distinctive quality of the contemporary novel is that of 'embodying the idea of the novel'. Contemporary novels are 'highly self-reflective', philosophical, rather eccentric works compared to what were usually considered novels (Danto 1986, 189). The sort of philosophisation that here is believed to pass through these novels is, roughly, akin to Danto's description. One can see the premises and consequences of his thought and his principle that the end of art corresponds to a dissolution of the sensible aspect in favour of its tendency to become reflective thought about itself. But Danto does not go into much depth.

In the present paragraph—looking at literary concreteness and remaining to a certain extent more faithful to Hegel than Danto—I intend to support the thesis that this series of novels dissolves its being a 'classical' (again, in a broader sense) novel. They reflect on themselves, on their form and content, and try to break the bonds of the 'idea of novel' that underlies them, without—and here I do not embrace the latest results suggested by Danto in his reading of the end of art—turning themselves *tout court* into philosophy. In them, there is a movement of self-understanding of what they are; sometimes it is even possible that there is an explicit presence of a philosophical thought or trend, but this does not make them less literature and more philosophy. It represents only one of the ways, among others, that literature has to express itself. After all—with Hegel—the forms of absolute spirit, even if they pass through the changes of time and maintain relationships which are sometimes of close proximity to each other, always maintain their own identity.

What is considered valid here in Danto's interpretation is a tendency. A certain kind of contemporary novel turns in a reflective way on itself. This reflection, however, does not give rise to a radical transformation, but rather to a consequent attempt to elaborate strategies to experiment with new ways of remaining and being a novel. I intend to read these artistic phenomena in a sort of 'Hegelian way', as an expression of the emergence of modern subjectivity that, in the contemporary world, overflows in all

its experimental freedom and in the variety that the self-reflexive processes produce.

On a similar note to that of Danto, but with specific reference to Hegel, Pippin stands out when, in a rather cursory mention, he traces the experimentations and the multiperspectivism of the modernist novel back to the strengthening of modern subjectivity. In fact, the modernist novel, as it has been configured in authors like Joyce, Woolf or Musil, could certainly be a valid example of this tendency to philosophisation and an attempt, reflecting on its own configuration, to escape from the traditional parameters of the great realist novel through an experimentation that is, at the same time, thematic, stylistic, linguistic and structural.² Going well beyond the modernist novel and coming to the present day, William Marx speaks of contemporary literature as a 'hyper-conscious literature' (*littérature hyperconsciente*): a literature of continuous experimentation and radicalised self-awareness, whose form opens up, whose styles overlap each other, whose fiction is self-declared as such.³ It can be read as a modern Hegelian subject, which is traversed by reflection and through reflection creates fractures in the 'epic' world of the novel, taking its freedom to extremes and following unexplored paths. At the same time, however, this operation of experimentation and radicalisation of the novel's features does not transform the novel into something different from itself, does not create a definitive and irreversible fracture, but renews, within the novel, its own being a novel.

A first modality of this 'philosophisation' can be found in what we can call the 'novel of the novel', the novel that reflects on itself and, through this reflection devises strategies that involve the writer and the reader in a radical rethinking of the novel genre from within. It is a process which

²Pippin writes: 'It is possible, for example, to see the modernist novels of James, Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Musil et al. as presenting a historically distinct representation of human subjectivity, in unprecedented relations of social dependence and independence not capturable by even the greatest 'realist' novels and so requiring a distinct aesthetic form, with shifting, unstable and highly provisional points of view and constant experimentation with authorial authority and narrative coherence' (Pippin 2008, 416).

³'Literature thus entered a phase of experimentation from which it has not yet emerged: from Günter Grass to Salman Rushdie, from Oe Kenzaburô to Gao Xingjian, the movement has taken on a global dimension. The forms open up, the styles clash, the fiction itself denounces its own illusions. And the vertiginous burst of the novel offers literature a magnificent final bouquet' (Marx 2005, 180).

can be defined as meta-fictional and often intertextual, typical of much contemporary literature in which the subjectivity of the author is present in terms of the serious game of dis-combining, dislocating and destroying traditional elements in order to reaffirm them under a new guise. Examples are countless.

Coming closer to the present day, think of one of the works—in this case, in fact, a short story—most analysed and quoted by the contemporary philosophy of literature and which has already been taken into account here for other purposes, namely Borges' *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* (1944). In this text, parts of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* are reproduced, word for word, by the fictional character Menard, a novelist who writes, in this way, a text identical to the first, but at the same time and to a certain extent radically different, indeed, 'almost infinitely richer' (Borges 2004, 449/94). This short story has attracted a lot of attention mostly for questions of art ontology and authorship. Here, however, I would like to highlight the reflective process behind it: a literary artwork, that of Borges, narrates another (fictitious) literary artwork, Menard's *Quixote*, which reproduces another (real) literary artwork, Cervantes' *Quixote*. In this case, it is not a mere quotation—or, if we want to speak of a quotation, it is a quotation with a particular density. Here, at stake, there is a reflexive process that is the structuring element of the whole story. If we then consider that Cervantes' *Quixote*, in the custom of many works of world literature, uses the expedient of the found manuscript, the reflexive vortex could continue with the (real) literary artwork, Cervantes' *Quixote*, which would be the transcription of another (fictitious) text written by the (fictitious) historian Cide Hamete Benengeli, which someone else had translated from Arabic for Cervantes.

Borges' reflection through the paradox of Menard's operation tells us that the world is rich in infinite possible worlds, that historical distance can multiply the meanings of what has been and that literature is exactly the means by which this perspective can be opened up. The formal operation of constructing a story about literature, in this case, indicates in content terms the potential of literature for life.

Another example of this reflection that literature works on itself is that of Paul Auster who, in *City of Glass*, the first story or short novel of his *The New York Trilogy* (1985), stages a dialogue between the character who bears

his name, 'Paul Auster', and Quinn precisely on the authorship of Cervante's *Quixote*.⁴ The fictional Auster is writing an essay that 'mostly has to do with authorship of the book. Who wrote it, and how it was written' (Auster 2004, 97). His problem is to identify who Cide Hamete Benengeli is, the historian whose manuscript Cervantes tells us he has recovered, and his hypothesis is that he is more than one person: 'the witness', Sancho Panza, the barber and the priest, 'Don Quixote's good friends', who entrusted the manuscript to 'Simon Carasco, the bachelor from Salamanca, who proceeded to translate it into Arabic' (Auster 2004, 98–99). At this point, the reflexive operation becomes complex: Paul Auster writes a (real) literary artwork, *City of Glass*, in which there is a character who, in an explicit reflection, is named after him and who writes a (fictitious) text; this (fictitious) text is about a (real) literary artwork, Cervantes' *Quixote*, which says that its text would be the transcription of another (fictitious) text written by the historian Cide Hamete Benengeli, which the fictitious 'Paul Auster' (character of the real Paul Auster) ascribes to the (fictitious) character of (the real) Cervantes. And the reflection of literature on literature seems to become almost endless. In this case, in a much darker way than Borges' Menard, Auster's 'Auster', through the reflection of literature on itself, warns about the risks of fiction: we must believe Cervantes—says the character of Auster—who does everything to say that he really found a manuscript (which is invented), because his 'is an attack on the dangers of the make-believe' and in doing so ends up believing that the authors of the manuscript, and therefore of the novel, are the same invented characters. It is a meaning that seems to be within the space of literature, but in reality it reflects on real interpersonal relationships and practices of society in a figurative key.

Continuing with classic contemporary examples, think of a novel from a few years before the text by Auster, Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979). By explicit statement of the author, this novel is 'a novel about the pleasure of reading novels' (Calvino 1984, vi). And this content is manifested through the reflective operation of the author. Here, the reflexive process of the author's subjectivity is so strong that it overturns, exteriorises itself, objectifies itself in its relationship with literature,

⁴The presence of Cervantes in *City of Glass* is discussed in Musarra-Schröder (2009).

becomes something else and calls into question the reader as the author's direct counterpart: the narrator of the frame of the novel does not use the first person, but the second. The author's 'I' becomes the 'I' of whoever reads the novel and whoever reads in general. The main character of the novel is the reader, or rather, 'the reader' (personified as a character) and Ludmilla, the other reader. This novel tells the story of the experience of reading the first pages of ten novels, in succession. The first novel is entitled *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* by Italo Calvino: in this case, Calvino's novel, in the first chapter, talks about itself and its author, in an all too evident reflexive process. The reading, narrated in Calvino's novel of Calvino's novel, is interrupted by a typographical misprint so that after a while the pages are repeated. Hence, the reader, who at the end of the material, 'un-narrated', real novel, will also be able to finish the narrated, fictitious novel and go on to read other novels, narrated and fictitious novels, written by fictitious authors, invented by Calvino (as the real author of the novel and not the author of the narrated novel). Even of these novels, the (narrated) 'reader' will only be able to read the first pages and the reading experience will be interrupted for several reasons, from the fact that the novel is unfinished (as is the case of *Leaning from the steep slope*, by the Cimmerian poet Ukko Ahti) to the fact that, censored in the country where the 'reader' and Ludmilla live, the novel is requisitioned by the police (as happens with *On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon* by Japanese author Takakumi Ikoka). In this case, the process of reflection put in place by the subjectivity of the writer leads the novel to literally reflect on itself, to narrate itself; the strategies of openness and combination—so beloved by Calvino—show the intention to go beyond the 'roundness' of a 'classic' form, to produce a text that goes beyond the idea that all things are 'in their place'. However, in the end, things remain in their place, in their new place, in a reflective process that does not dissolve the literary work itself, but changes it, indicating new directions.

Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1966) is another of these examples of how the author involves the reader in the reflective process of the novel about itself, inviting him to discover the possible books that the book contains. In the book—says the author in the *Table of Instruction*—there are at least two books: one goes from chapter 1 and consequently reaches 56, without considering the last part of the book; the second, starting from

chapter 72, spans the book through a path indicated by the author via a number indicating the next chapter at the end of each. Here, the novel is decomposed to be recomposed each time through editing, dislocation, and assemblages; it becomes shorter, it stretches, and it changes. The reader is led to reflect on the novel that reflects on itself and in this reflection unfolds. In addition, she also finds a character like Morelli, the old writer, whose reflections and notes on writing make sure that this reflective process is explicitly staged. In this summation of interrupted and reconnected roads, of possibilities now apparently random now consequential, the reader is placed in the continuous doubt of where it will go next. And in this raising of doubts throughout the novel lies its general meaning as an existential reflection on the impermanence and volatility of life (the relationships of love, first of all that of La Maga, or friends, or Morelli who makes a serious accident) and on the need to throw oneself into it as one throws oneself into the game of hopscotch.

The shape that this contemporary novel takes on is undoubtedly a result of the intensification of the subjective ability of the author. She acts with force towards the content, and therefore, dialectically, the form of the novels she produces takes on a freedom of always finding new solutions. The reflection of the novel on itself has produced a philosophisation of the novel that has given it new possibilities. A reflexive mode applied to the novel can be part of the practices of what has been defined as 'meta-fiction' or 'hyper-fiction'.⁵ Here, experimentalism has become 'hyper-experimentalism' and has produced a novel that 'denies', in some cases even violently, itself or, better, the usual idea one has of it. And in this way, it just reaffirms itself with force: it dissolves what it was, to survive and live again.

It is a trend that can be identified in the label 'postmodern', but that seems to have all its roots in that modernity that Hegel, also talking about the novel, described. The 'prose of thought' seems to describe exactly this leaning of 'poetry' towards something else, something that is made of reflexive, cerebral, all in all philosophical, processes. This trend seems to be alive more than ever, even in recent years and, indeed, seems to have gone even further on the road of paroxysm, exaggeration, and 'hysteria'.

⁵For a recent discussion of the contemporary novel as a 'hyper-novel', that is, as a complex and plural network of the production of thought, cf. Regazzoni (2018).

Referring specifically to the American fiction of the 1980s and the 1990s (especially, McElroy, Mailer, Brodkey, Gaddis), Frederick R. Karl spoke of the 'Mega-Novel' as a completely new phenomenon, which in 1950s and 1960s went hand in hand with the post-war developments of 'Abstract Expressionism in painting and aleatory or randomness in music' (Karl 2001, 156). This is the same period that Danto identified as preparatory and coinciding with the 'end of art'. Karl describes Mega-Novel as a 'commentary on the novel form itself' (Karl 2001, 155), as a sort of reflection of the novel on itself. This reflection has not only led to the production of very long novels, an element that characterises them only externally, but to a real rethinking of the genre in an attempt to push the genre out of itself through the modality of excess,⁶ becoming something very strange and even paradoxical. In this sense, Karl writes that the 'so-called Mega-Novel is loaded with paradoxes: it *is* long, but lacks any sense of completion; while it has no boundaries for an ending, of course it does end; it seems to defy clear organisation—it seems decentred, unbalanced—yet has intense order; it is located outside traditional forms of narrative, but still employs some conventional methods. Its aim posits disorder, messiness, the chaos of our existence and by extension of our times; nevertheless, its length, complexity, and on-goingness make it a model of order' (Karl 2001, 155). It seems to be, in an exasperated way, like the peculiarity of poetry (in the sense of literature) for Hegel, the art that corresponds most to the concept of art and at the same time to something else than art, or to the paradoxical character of the novel, always in tension between a totality impossible to achieve and a subjectivity that is the result of the fracture of the primordial totality.

The Mega-Novel is a novel that comes out of itself to remain itself. The disorder, the strangeness, the paradox that it brings with it and that it applies to its own form and content are all elements that allow it to resist its own end and reappear under new clothes, but still within its own sphere of origin. These are novels that seem to deny the novel and, by denying it, reaffirm it even more powerfully.

⁶In this regard, LeClaire speaks of a 'novel of excess' in LeClaire (1989). Karl's Mega-Novel and LeClaire's novel of excess are discussed in Ercolino (2014a, 2–10).

Another recent interpretation that, to some extent, could correspond to the analysis of a 'prose of thought' is that of Stefano Ercolino. He attempts to identify a genre, a trend in contemporary fiction, that is the 'maximalist novel'. He takes into consideration seven novels published in the last part of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first. The novels that are the subject of his discussion are Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001), Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004) and Babette Fackery's *2005 dopo Cristo* (2005).

He identifies the maximalist novel as an autonomous specification of the postmodern novel which, in its peculiarity, goes so far as to take up and rethink some modernist stylistic elements, which the generally intended postmodernist had fought against. To do this, it formulates a series of ten exemplary features that are present, to varying degrees, in all these texts: (1) the strictly material aspect of the length as a structural feature; (2) pronounced encyclopaedic openness as a synthesis of the heterogeneous, an element that it takes from the most classical tradition of the novel and that it reinterprets, starting from its modernist variations (think of Joyce's *Ulysses*); (3) 'dissonant chorality', defined as an interweaving between the fact that the plurality of voices does not allow the clear identification of a dominant narrative intention and the fact that the concentration of languages, styles, genres and knowledges is so complex as to reach levels of paroxysm never reached before; (4) diegetic exuberance as a hypertrophic concentration of stories, characters and topics; (5) a tension towards completeness, pursued through structural techniques such as the use of a circular narrative, a rigorous, almost obsessive control of time and the use of recurrent conceptual structures; (6) narrative omniscience, obtained as a recomposition, at a microstructural level, of the various fragments that make up the story or through an unaltered focus that controls the whole from a macro-structural point of view; (7) paranoid imagination, consisting of conspiratorial tendencies and apocalyptic references, intended as a reaction to post-structuralist exasperations and as a manifestation of the desire for a recovery of 'enchantment in the world', with a sort of '*holistic ontology*' (Ercolino 2014a, 109–111) underlying it, according to which everything must be part of a larger design; (8) intersemioticity, understood

as a positive attempt by the maximalist novel to survive the centrality of other media and produced mainly through hybridisation with techniques and topics related to the image, both cinematographic and pictorial; (9) ethical commitment and social issues; and (10) 'hybrid realism', i.e. a particular form of realism, which springs from the systematic contamination of the various media and which is produced as a fusion of mimetic elements and anti-realist extravagances. Ercolino's proposed conditions, lastly, are organised through a dialectic between what he calls a 'chaos-function' and a 'cosmos-function', that is in a contrast and interrelation between 'anarchy versus order, centrifugal forces versus centripetal forces, chaos versus cosmos' (Ercolino 2014a, 115). Within the various novels, that is, some features, i.e. the length, the encyclopaedic world, the dissonant chorus and the diegetic exuberance, contribute to implementing narrative entropy (chaos-function); other elements, instead, such as the completeness, narratorial omniscience, the paranoid imagination, operate in the opposite direction, carrying out a task of containment and control (cosmos-function). Especially, this last feature of the relationship, we could say dialectical, between chaos and cosmos recalls the paradoxical character of the novel, already stressed several times, that it always stands between wholeness and fracture. Although not entirely in line with what is proposed here, both Karl's and Ercolino's analyses are significant for identifying the kind of contemporary novel I take into consideration.

The novel as theorised by Karl's and Ercolino's approaches is in many ways the novel that, in a Hegelian way, is contaminated by the 'prose of thought', a novel that, reflecting on its status, dissolves the typical characteristics of the artwork, tends to go outside of itself, towards new spaces of knowledge, and, in so doing, reaffirms with all its vitality itself as a novel. For reasons of space this is not the place to go into the matter, but it is impossible not to notice how a tendency to exceed the literary form has been typical of literature since ancient times, obviously already in the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde of the twentieth century. But one could go back even further into the past and get to writings often considered as 'writings of excess' like those of Rabelais or Folengo. This suggests that the tendency towards this kind of writing, as is included in the prose of thought, has always been inherent in literature and emerges in the contemporary world only with a more evident force.

In addition to the novel's tendency to reflect on itself in a conceptually twisting movement, we can find a second way to identify the trend of the novel towards a scientific prose of thought. It is about the ability, within the genre of the novel, to include topics and formal elements typical of nonfiction essayistic treatment. LeClair, for example, vigorously argues the need to take the technical and scientific passages of *Gravity's Rainbow* seriously and not as metaphors. These inserts, especially those referring to systems ecology, are determinant for understanding Pynchon's novel and make it 'a catalog, a huge compendium', characterised by a 'high density of information' (LeClair 1989, 39–40). Ercolino identifies as one of the traits of the maximalist novel the 'encyclopedic mode' as a 'clear perception on the part of the reader of a strong narrative tension directed toward the construction of vast and heterogeneous cross sections of specific socioeconomic and cognitive context' (Ercolino 2014a, 41). Among others, the examples he proposes range from the detailed lists of seaweed in Bolaño, to the discussion of Pieter Bruegel's *The Triumph of Death* in Don DeLillo, from the passage on the genetics of mice in Zadie Smith to one of the many paragraphs on toxicology by David Foster Wallace (Ercolino 2014a, 42–45).

And it is right on *Infinite Jest* that I want to dwell for a moment, because among the recent examples it seems to me one of the most remarkable. It is a novel that tries to go to the limits of the genre to which it belongs, tries to violate, break and overcome them, by reformulating and affirming itself as a novel. It produces a world overloaded with elements, which accumulate and entangle each other. It is a world consisting of several poles (the E. T. A., the Enfield Tennis Academy and Ennet House) and an overflowing multiplicity of characters (the Incandenza family, first of all, and then, among others, Don Gately and the drug addicts of Ennet House, up to the Quebec separatists of the AFR, Les Assassins en Fauteuils Roulants, and other terrorist organisations, to mention the main ones), who somehow, among drugs, depression, tennis and Eschaton matches, have to do with the mysterious film of the late James O. Incandenza, called 'Infinite Jest', which produces a lethal addiction for whoever watches it. It is a novel in which situations are piled up and wedged in a complex interweaving of times and places.

Here, I would like to underline an element, perhaps among the most noticeable, but not at all trivial: *Infinite Jest* is a novel where footnotes play a constitutive role.⁷ Usually, an essay is accompanied by footnotes, or the critical edition of a novel; in *Infinite Jest*, the footnotes are an integral and decisive part of the text. Footnotes are tools that are typical of a scientific and academical writing. Wallace assumes and radicalises them within a literary context. If they in some (quite rare) case have an exterior explanatory value (they explain to the reader, in a detached way, what the reader has just read), in many other cases they have no explanatory value at all. Their function is entirely narrative. The footnotes of *Infinite Jest* discuss, extend and enrich the novel. Often inside footnotes, there are other footnotes that refer to the superordinate footnotes and internal references among the footnotes, in a further reflective process. They are footnotes that force the novel further. They look like secondary doors on the back of a building with the promise (not kept) of leading the reader out of the building, but which make her fall back inside, profoundly enriching the story.

There are footnotes that in themselves are admittedly explanatory, but of which a common narrative does not seem to feel the need, such as those on the drugs that are mentioned by the characters ('1. Methamphetamine hydrochloride, a.k.a. crystal meth', '6. Lightweight tranq: Valium-III and Valrelease, good old dependable Xanax, Dalmane, Buspar, Serax, even Halcion', Wallace 2006, 983). Furthermore, there are footnotes that expand the understanding of the characters and include elements that will come back later in the novel, like the long footnote 24 on James O. Incandenza's filmography, where, in addition to the versions of the film 'Infinite Jest', and many other film titles which only have a list function, there are also titles that will come back later in the story, like 'Wave¹ Bye-Bye¹ to¹ the¹ Bureaucrat or Blood¹ Sister¹: One¹ Tough¹ Nun' (Wallace 2006, 985–993). There are footnotes in which the narrator comments on his own narration: for instance, '25. More like July–October, actually', remarking on the duration of the marriage, from May to December, of James O. Incandenza and Avril (Wallace 2006, 994); or '49. Redundancy *sic*', on the name 'Ennet House Drug and Alcohol Recovery

⁷ *Infinite Jest* is, overall, a 1079 page novel. Of these, about one hundred pages are of footnotes.

House', in the opening of the digression on the house of recovery from drug addiction (Wallace 2006, 995). There are also footnotes that extend, in all respects, the narrative, from Orin's interview passages at footnotes 145 (Wallace 2006, 1026–1028) and 234 (Wallace 2006, 1038–1044) to Orin's childhood friend Bain's story at footnote 269 (Wallace 2006, 1047–1052). The phenomenology of footnote typologies in *Infinite Jest* is very varied and could continue.

What is interesting here, however, is that, without them, Wallace's narration would perhaps be possible, but it would be incomplete. The element of the notes—a typical case of reflection—seems to be one of the most perspicuous elements in *Infinite Jest* to point out how the novel, and with it literature, can go towards a prose of thought. The editorial norm of a scientific content is assumed to the utmost power and reformulated in the context of the novel. It is the clue of an advancement of the prose of thought that does not conquer the whole territory of poetry, that is of literature (in this case of the novel), but is held back by the resistance that literature opposes, reshaping its meaning and modality. In this case, reflection is explicitly manifested as a 'commentary', in the words of Karl. This is a commentary whose modalities do not belong directly to the novel, but that it renews and renewing them, renews itself and departs from the fate of the end.⁸

Moreover, the crossing towards the prose of thought by Wallace's novel is evident also at the linguistic and stylistic level. Remaining at *Infinite Jest*, take, for example, the description of the game significantly called 'Eschaton', a sort of sport imagined by Wallace, which reproduces an atomic war through a mixture of tennis and computer technology. It is a game that is based on a rigid logical order, mathematical rules and statistical skills. At this game, Micheal Pemulis, Hal's friend who provides him with the drug, is a prodigy and one whose match, shortly afterwards, will end in disarray, with consequences. Eschaton is a very complicated game:

⁸Again, the fact that literature crosses a scientific or essayistic dimension does not seem to be a characteristic of this kind of novel, but it seems to be present also in past eras. Ercolino analysed the topic with regard to European literature between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, identifying a proper literary genre that embodies the crisis of modernity (Ercolino 2014b).

Every year at E.T.A., maybe a dozen of the kids between maybe like twelve and fifteen — children in the very earliest stages of puberty and really abstract-capable thought, when one's allergy to the confining realities of the present is just starting to emerge as weird kind of nostalgia for stuff you never even knew [120. This basic phenomenon being what more abstraction-capable post-Hegelian adults call 'Historical Consciousness'.] — maybe a dozen of these kids, mostly male, get fanatically devoted to a homemade Academy game called Eschaton. Eschaton is the most complicated children's game anybody around E.T.A.'d ever heard of. [...] Eschaton takes eight to twelve people to play, w/ 400 tennis balls so dead and bald they can't even be used for service drills anymore, plus an open expanse equal to the area of four contiguous tennis courts, plus a head for data-retrieval and coldly logical cognition, along with at least 40 megabytes of available RAM and wide array of tennis paraphernalia. The vade-mecumish rulebook that Pemulis in Y.P.W. got Hal Incandenza to write — with appendices and sample c:\Pink2\Mathpak\EndStat-path Decision-Tree diagrams and an offset of the most accessible essay Pemulis could find on applied game theory — is about as long and interesting as J. Bunyan's stupefying Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come, and a pretty tough nut to compress into anything lively (although every year a dozen more E.T.A. kids memorize the thing at such a fanatical depth that they sometimes report reciting mumbled passages under light dental or cosmetic anesthesia, years later). (Wallace 2006, 321–322)

The prose of thought is a cerebral prose. As one can see from the explanation of Eschaton, it is a prose of sharp and scientific precision that tries to describe the object of study with a compelling argument. At the same time, it is extremely exuberant. It is a hyperbolic prose, made of subordinates, parenthetical elements, specifications and specifications of specifications. When the style is paratactic, it is so by accumulation, by extension of multiplicity ('Eschaton takes eight [...] tennis paraphernalia'). Interruptions and hyperbatons are a constant quality of Wallace's syntax and are expressed by a variety of grammatical devices: from dashes and brackets to footnotes. The reflexive, cerebral vortex, in fact, of this type of prose manifests in Wallace—an author, by the way, not at all alien

to philosophy⁹—starting from the use of language. All this is expressed in a multiple series of references, allusions, quotations. It is a style of too much, but it does not produce confusion, gratuitous disorder. Reading carefully, everything returns. The rationality of prose is scientific.

At the same time, it is not a purely formal issue (as it was not with the reflection of the novel on itself), but it is intertwined, in Hegelian terms, with the content that is expressed, e.g. with the description of a college (and therefore an academic context), in which technology, media and drugs create multiple and exasperated networks of addiction. The prose of thought that *Infinite Jest* acquires and makes its own in an artistic re-elaboration belonging to the genre of the novel corresponds to the articulated and widespread condition of addiction that in the novel is exacerbated, but which describes a cross section of the '80s and '90s. In short, it reflects and gives shape to the dangerous power of James O. Incandenza's film.

The prose of thought is therefore given in the modes of expression and in the themes of a particular kind of novel that can be generically understood as postmodern or that, in the last decades, has experienced an evolution and new classifications such as, among other possibilities, the 'Mega novel' or 'maximalist novel'. It takes the novel to its limits, makes the novel rethink in a cerebral way its contents, forms and structures, trying to push it beyond itself, but always encountering resistance. The movement of reflection, the novel of the novel, and the novel that itself takes elements of the scientific context as examples and expressions of a literary artwork crossed by the prose of thought.

In this rethinking of the novel, one can identify one of the ways that the novel (and literature in general) has resisted its own end, not abandoning itself to anything else (in this case, the prose of thought), but renewing itself continuously. But it is not the only way that literature has to face its own end: at the opposite extreme, we find the nonfiction novel.

⁹In addition to having studied philosophy at university, philosophical themes and questions return on several occasions in his fictional and nonfictional writings. For instance, *The Broom of the System*, his first novel, is described by the author as a 'conversation between Wittgenstein and Derrida' (Lipsky 2010, 35). The relationship between Wallace and philosophy traverses the essays of Bolger and Korb (2014).

3 Novel and Ordinariness

Along with the prose of thought, we have seen how Hegel indicates another extreme that delimits poetry as the opposite pole, that is the prose of everyday life: on the one hand, he interprets poetry as the last limit of art that constitutes the boundary, within absolute spirit, with other forms of religion and philosophy, and therefore, it has been interpreted as bordering on a tendency to philosophisation; on the other hand, he conceives poetry in modernity as a decisive place of the past character of art and therefore has been conceived as a phenomenon that comes to terms with the ordinariness of life. Indeed, one could say that, among literary works of art, the novel is for Hegel one of the genres that enters more deeply into modern social life, the artistic form—probably together with painting—that most experiences the intrusion of everyday life in art, once the sacred way in which art as it was presented and experienced in ancient times had been dissolved.

There is certainly a thematic, content-based link between the novel, as the epic of modern times, and everyday reality. Still remaining at the Hegelian description, the novel as a genre is devoted not so much to the representation of extraordinary or heroic events, but more usually to that of ordinary and social scenes. At the same time, there is also an even deeper and more primordial connection between what in Hegelian terms we could define as the pole of poetry, conceived as the very notion of literature, and that of the prose of the world. A connection that, understood in a different and even opposite key, is the same one that concerned the link between the poetry and prose of thought: both the prose of everyday life and poetry are expressed through words; they use language or figurative representations. The verbal medium is the one that links the pole of poetry with that of the prose of the world and also with that of the prose of thought. However, the prose of the world crosses and to a certain extent transforms the pole of poetry, but in a radically different way from the prose of thought.

In contemporary literature and novels, we can identify a clear orientation towards the prose of everyday life in what, in the broadest sense, is called the nonfiction novel. This literary tendency does not consist so much in reflecting on the contents, forms and structures of the literary object in order to unhinge them and distort their conception, changing

their status into something eccentric, exuberant. In this case, the movement is the opposite of the postmodern novel and its derivatives.¹⁰ This kind of novel does not turn in on itself to dissolve what seems the ordinary course of things. The tendency produced by contact with the prose of the world consists in the fact that poetry looks at reality, trying to reproduce it in its own daily life, of course simple or exceptional, but still having as a reference the external dimension 'as it appears'. Moreover, in the specific case of the nonfiction novel the literary attitude consists in bringing, in a literary frame, a journalistic form of report. The journalistic form of writing, which comes closest to accounting for things and facts of everyday life in a punctual and dry way, penetrates the mesh of literature.

Nonetheless, without wanting to create anything eccentric or subversive, but aiming, in the exact opposite direction, at the most faithful and direct correspondence with the world, what is fundamental here is that this trend too reveals itself to be genuinely contemporary. In the same way as the postmodern outcome and the like, the product of the nonfiction novel also comes from our time, speaks to our time and is our time.

The prose of the world enters in a certain way into the dimension of poetry. At the same time, the pole of poetry, as we will see, is not totally annulled by the prose of the world; there is always a residue that makes this kind of novel recognised as a novel.¹¹ This is another way that, compared to the other encounter with the prose of thought, poetry or literature constitutively manifests and expresses its resistance to the end.

As for the prose of thought, also with regard to the discourse on the prose of everyday life, it seems that we are talking about a not so recent history. The essentially mimetic intention of reproducing everyday life in literature has ancient roots and is part, in addition to literature, of a constitutive element of Western history and culture.¹² As is well known, realism had as a literary movement its great fortune in the nineteenth century with authors such as Flaubert, Zola and Maupassant, among others,

¹⁰P. D'Angelo discusses the nonfiction novel as an example of the 'end of literature' with particular attention to the novel *Resistere non serve a niente* by Walter Siti in D'Angelo (2013, 197–207).

¹¹Very trivially, in bookstore catalogs, even if with some difficulties in some cases, this trend and the examples that will be proposed end up in the 'narrative' section.

¹²For two detailed and wide-ranging discussions within the endless debate on realism in literature, see Brooks (2005) and Bertoni (2007).

and with the development of the sub-genre of the great historical novel that characterised the century, from Hugo to Tolstoy. The realist gaze, the attempt to reproduce reality in literature, is certainly one of the most relevant trends in the history of literature, suggesting, even in this case, that a tendency towards ordinariness has always been inherent in literature itself. However, this trend, in recent years, seems to have had particular success. The radicalisation of some of its distinctive features in the non-fiction novel can be conceived of as the last episode of the long history of realism.

As a contemporary genre (or grouping, if it is difficult to speak of a genre within which to include specific cases of recent novels), the nonfiction novel has its roots in the United States, but several cases, of critical and public importance, can also be found in other literary worlds. This literary form tends to be traced back to the American context of the mid-1960s (the period of Danto's end of the art), to the so-called New Journalism, that is, to that kind of journalism characterised by a strong authorial imprint, which tries to bring the reader, through the most effective means of literature, into the world of 'facts'.¹³ The result is the 'truth-novel', 'reportage-novel', which is not simply journalism that occupies the space of a book, but is a literary form that uses the dynamics of the novel and inserts the attitude of the newspaper.¹⁴ In 1973, Tom Wolfe published an anthology of the New Journalism that presented the literary phenomenon, discussed the concept of the nonfiction novel and included texts of his own and other authors.¹⁵ In the *Introduction* to the volume, Wolfe describes the phenomenon of New Journalism as both an involved person and a

¹³The rise of the nonfiction novel in '60, especially in relation to the crisis of the novel, is tackled in Hollowell (1977, 3–20).

¹⁴Karl attempts a definition and corrects the label 'non-fiction' to 'non-novelistic fiction'; he thus brings all the attention to the journalistic side of the narrative and reduces, perhaps too much, the artistic and literary contribution of this form. He writes: '[t]he non-fiction novel is misnamed. It should be called "non-novelistic fiction," since it transforms fact into fiction without using the full dimensions of a novelistic sensibility. The stress in this form of writing – whether one labels it "new" or "higher" journalism, "non-fiction novel," or some other variants – is on the self of the author intruding into work that is factual' (Karl 1983, 560).

¹⁵The anthology collects texts by Rex Reed, Gay Talese, Richard Goldstein, Michael Herr, Truman Capote, Joe Eszterhas, Terry Southern, Hunter S. Thompson, Norman Mailer, Nicholas Tomalin, Barbara L. Goldsmith, Joe McGinniss, George Plimpton, James Mills, John Gregory Dunne, John Sack, Joan Didion, 'Adam Smith', Robert Christgau, Garry Wills.

historical witness and recounts his experience with this kind of writing as follows:

What interested me was not simply the discovery that it was possible to write accurate non-fiction with techniques usually associated with novels and short stories. It was that – plus. It was the discovery that it was possible in non-fiction, in journalism, to use any literary device, from the traditional dialogism of the essay to stream-of-consciousness, and to use many different kinds simultaneously, or within a relatively short space...to excite the reader both intellectually and emotionally. (Wolfe 1975, 28)

From a journalistic perspective, the nonfiction novel of New Journalism tried to depict the facts as they appeared, using the means of the novel and short stories, in order to make the narrative exciting and compelling. It was therefore not a question of inventing anything, but of making the facts ‘intellectually and emotionally’ more engaging, powerful and, therefore, even more realistic. A way of writing that Wolfe consciously brings back to the great tradition of the realist social novel—he mentions Fielding, Smollett, Balzac, Dickens and Gogol’ (Wolfe 1975, 46).¹⁶ This kind of writing was expressed mainly through four devices: (1) the use of a ‘scene-by-scene construction, telling the story by moving from scene to scene and resorting as little as possible to sheer historical narrative’; (2) the attempt to ‘record the dialogue in full’ and, in so doing, involve the reader more completely and define the character more effectively; (3) ‘the so-called “third-person point of view”, the technique of presenting every scene to the reader through the eyes of a particular character, giving the reader the feeling of being inside the character’s mind and experiencing the emotional reality of the scene as he experiences it’ (Wolfe 1975, 46); and (4) ‘the recording of everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing, decoration, styles of traveling, eating, keeping house, modes of behaving toward children, servants, superiors, inferiors, peers, plus the various looks, glances, poses, styles of walking and other symbolic

¹⁶For a reading that emphasises the importance of considering the significant detachment from the tradition of the conventional realist novel and instead underlines the links with that of American modernist fiction, see Smart (1985, 1–28).

details that might exist within a scene' (Wolfe 1975, 47).¹⁷ There is, therefore, in the nonfiction novel of the New Journalism a sort of attention to the real in its most specific and insignificant details. At the same time, it aims at everyday life, but it does so in such a way as to make everyday life fascinating and captivating, putting in crisis at a theoretical level what belongs to the arid and supposedly irrefutable nonfictional report of reality and what is to be traced back to its novelistic transformation.

Within the group of nonfiction novels released by the New Journalism, one of the most influential and important cases, considered to be the initiator of the movement, is Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. There, the author tries to bring reality back into art. The story is well known: it tells of Capote's investigative work on a crime, namely the brutal murder of the Clutter family, a wealthy family in the farming town of Holcomb in Kansas, by the hands of Perry Edward Smith and Richard Eugene Hickock. Already in the subtitle—*A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences*—the aim is to report the facts, where the word 'true' and the will to cover everything that happened, as it happened, must be emphasised.¹⁸ It is an aim that is reiterated from the declaration present in the *Acknowledgments* at the beginning of the novel:

All the material in this book not derived from my own observation is either taken from official records or is the result of interviews with the persons directly concerned, more often than not numerous interviews conducted over a considerable period of time. (Capote 2000, vii)

Capote's narration, therefore, tries in every way to answer to fidelity, to adhere to facts and to the search for truth. Nothing will be told that has not been seen by him directly or that does not come from accredited and certified sources: nothing will be invented, everything that is told has *really* happened. The trend is journalistic, even though it is part of an artistic context and structure. Here too, the language reveals the kind of prose:

¹⁷Peter Lamarque addresses these conditions in depth, starting from the philosophical point of view of the distinction between fiction conceived as the form and nonfiction as the content of the nonfiction novel in Lamarque (2014, especially 89–94).

¹⁸The question of truth as a founding and problematic element in the definition of the nonfiction novel is addressed in Lehman (1997, 1–39).

That Monday, the sixteenth of November, 1959, was still another fine specimen of pheasant weather on the high wheat plains of western Kansas—a day gloriously bright-skied, as glittery as mica. Often, on such days in years past, Andy Erhart had spent long pheasant-hunting afternoons at River Valley Farm, the home of his good friend Herb Clutter, and often, on these sporting expeditions, he'd been accompanied by three more of Herb's closest friends: Dr. J. E. Dale, a veterinarian; Carl Myers, a dairy owner; and Everett Ogburn, a businessman. Like Erhart, the superintendent of the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station, all were prominent citizens of Garden City. (Capote 2000, 73)

The prose of the world emerges here, even at a stylistic level, becoming newspaper prose. There is nothing of the exuberance of the prose of thought, and there is nothing cerebral, nothing hyperbolic. It is all on a single level, the story is dry, the trend simple. But the simplicity is effective, concrete, 'true'. The rhythm is the syncopated one of journalism. What Capote sees, he writes. Furthermore, the sentences are short and the subordinate ones are limited to the completeness of the information. The references are precise and leave nothing undetermined or vague. It is the prose of the report: there is a place ('on the high wheat plains of western Kansas'), the indication of the chronological time ('Monday, the sixteenth of November, 1959') and the weather ('was still another fine specimen of pheasant weather [...] a day gloriously bright-skied, as glittery as mica'); of the characters general information is given, a name and a surname ('Andy Erhart', 'Herb Clutter', 'Carl Myers', 'Everett Ogburn'), a title (for those in possession of one, 'Dr. J. E. Dale') and a qualification, mostly professional ('his good friend', 'a veterinarian', 'a dairy owner', 'a businessman', 'the superintendent of the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station'). In any case, the social perception they enjoy among their fellow citizens ('all eminent citizens of Garden City'). Apparently without inventions of any kind or virtuous exhibitions, it is a prose that in its effectiveness brings out all the restlessness of the situation narrated and, with it, the cruelty hidden in the human spirit.

The nonfiction novel tries to bring the world into the novel. A world not necessarily (or not in the first instance) made of epoch-making historical events. It is a novel that speaks, through the language of the present

common life, to the present common life. A novel that looks for, if anything, the incredible, the unexpected event—one might say, the journalistic scoop—in the disarming banality of everyday life.

Moving into more recent times, I will articulate the discourse on the prose of everyday life in the contemporary world through two specifications, which determine the content that is expressed through the form. The first articulation is that of the prose of everyday life as sort of investigative report, namely a meticulous collection of information aimed at a denunciation, as a revelation of something that is wrong in society. It is a journalistic genre that over time becomes also testimony, memory and historical source. This novelistic intent needs the prose of everyday life, because it becomes the means through which the state of things is revealed, a cheat unmasked and truths discovered.

One of the most significant examples of nonfiction novels of this kind is given by the extraordinary work of Svetlana Alexievich, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2015. Her novels are acts of witness and accusation that take their material directly and explicitly from some of the most problematic and complex realities of our time. Some of the topics she has addressed are the role of Soviet women at the front during World War II (*The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II*, 1985), the war veterans in Afghanistan (*Boys in Zinc*, 1991), the suicides caused by the downfall of the Soviet Union (*Enchanted with Death*, 1993), the victims of Chernobyl (*Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*, 1997) and life in Russia after Communism (*Second-Hand Time*, 2013). She is an author who has rightly been included in the list of nonfiction novelists and who has made the narration of the real as it has presented itself in history the cipher of her literary production.¹⁹ One of the most interesting cases of her production, from the point of view of the conception of the nonfiction novel and of the structure of the text itself, is the book on Chernobyl. It presents itself as a glimpse into the reality of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster through the voices of the survivors. The structure inserts and transforms into a novel's context the writing methods of journalism: the premise is aimed at giving historical information and

¹⁹The awarding of the Nobel Prize to Alexievich was supported (Gourevitch 2014) and then hailed (Saviano 2015) as a fact of extreme importance for the genre of the nonfiction novel, which, for its status halfway between journalism and literature, had always suffered an unfair underestimation.

facts and is composed of a collage made of excerpts from articles, magazines and encyclopaedias; in the same way, the epilogue consists of a short passage from a newspaper article; in addition to some interludes such as the author's interview with herself (another way of writing taken from journalism and reworked), the body of the text is composed mostly of a series of interviews with survivors. Alexievich has interviewed more than 500 people, including politicians, ordinary people, physicists and many other figures that she reports in the form of what she calls 'monologues' (often also dialogues or conversations between several people). This is one of the clearest examples in which contemporary literature meets everyday life, in terms of an encounter with the chronicle that in its tragedy becomes, in short, history. Re-elaborating the voices of ordinary people who have found themselves involved in the facts told, in this case journalism is mixed up with literature. But this in no way mystifies the facts; rather, it makes them even more compelling, fully restoring the drama that belongs to them, doing justice through memory, presenting them in a literary representation even more real than if they were presented as news in a newspaper.

The second articulation through which I read the prose of everyday life comes from a kind of journalistic writing closer to long articles, feature stories, *reportage*. It is a kind of journalist writing that does not have direct political or social (or historical) implications like a straight investigative report, but is characterised by the story of a particular topic, a far or interesting place, a famous personality whose features have been acquired through real experience, from first-hand encounter with the subject in question (so much so that often these kind of articles are accompanied by a photo shoot). Moreover, this kind of article allows a viewpoint that can be, at least at first glance, more personal than that of the investigative one.

A recent novel that perhaps could fall into this other category of the prose of everyday life could be Emmanuel Carrère's *Limonov* (2011), where the author writes a novel about the true life of a character who really exists. In 2006, Carrère is hired by a magazine to write a series of articles about the Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, recently murdered. At a commemoration in memory of the victims of the 2002 terroristic attack at the Dubrovka theatre in Moscow, Carrère glimpses Eduard Limonov, who he had met for the first time twenty years earlier. Limonov is a poet, a

politician, a borderline character, who fascinates Carrère. For this reason, Carrère decides to write a novel about him. After that episode, the book tells the exiting and adventure-filled story of Limonov. It ranges from Limonov's childhood and youth in Ukraine to his last years returning to Russia. It is the true story of a living man, but it is not just a biography; it is something more or something different—a novel. In the novel *Limonov*, an extraordinary reality provides the material for the (non)fiction: when Limonov, at the end of the novel asks Carrère why he wanted to write a book about him, he replies that it is because he had been a 'romantic [*romanesque*] [...] life' (Carrère 2011, 484/337). The material of the world gives the content to the novel, and Carrère records it in the text. The style is much less brutally journalistic than that of Capote, but there is always the aim of bringing back what has happened without pushing reality beyond its actual happening. We can read an example of that in the last pages of the book. Limonov has returned to post-Soviet Russia and participates in one of the street demonstrations of the time. Carrère reports the scene:

Once, invited by his comrade Alksnis, he gets up on the platform where the leaders of the opposition are speaking one after the other, and takes the megaphone. He says that the supposed 'democrats' are profiteers who've betrayed the blood shed by their fathers during the Great Patriotic War. That the people have suffered more in one year of supposed 'democracy' than in seventy years of communism. That anger is brewing and people should prepare for civil war. (Carrère 2011, 343/237).

The author records what Limonov said, one concept after another, in a series of statements that tell what 'really' occurred. Here, the repetition of the same syntactic structure certainly constitutes a rhetorical artifice, typical of the effectiveness of literary writing. However, the basic intent is to bring back, all things considered faithfully, the discourse of the Russian poet-politician, without missing any element, without inventing anything. At most, what Carrère adds is a comment on the reality he saw.

Already here we can see the fundamental problem of the nonfiction novel, which can be identified as the tension through which poetry resists the prose of the world: if reality enters the novel with all its brute 'facts', it is still through the very particular voice of the writer that these facts

are reported. Nonfiction, in its being a faithful recording of reality, suffers the hand, the style, the invention of the author's writing. Although Wolfe spoke of 'understatement' as the very quality of the author's voice in a nonfiction novel that was to be a 'white background' (Wolfe 31), the voice cannot but be heard, though only as embedded in the 'facts'.

Through the story of a 'real' situation, we can see the author who tells it. So *In Cold Blood* tells, in the background, of Capote who writes on the fact of the crime, in *Limonov*, the story of the romantic character is told as the experience, direct or indirect, that Carrère makes of this character, with the mixture of all his admiration, doubts and disapproval. The subjectivity of the author has not disappeared behind the 'facts'; on the contrary, it is more present than ever: it is the collector and interpreter of the facts. This does not mean that the writer replaces the world, its objects of narration, which remains at the centre in the novel. It does mean that this process of acquisition is not, of course, neutral, but driven by the perspective of those who experience and report it.

Another novel that can be included in the prose of everyday life in terms of the investigative report is Roberto Saviano's *Gomorrah* (2006), a novel whose *raison d'être* is grounded in reality. *Gomorrah* is based on actual investigations, taken from court reports and has aroused a debate in the society well beyond the literary context, meritoriously uncovered questions about the Camorra which had remained in the shadows and even dramatically changed the author's life, who still lives under escort. It is a novel that has produced consequences in reality, using the facts that the world provides. A novel that couldn't be more real, one could say. And indeed it is the author himself who perceives it as a nonfiction novel (Saviano 2010b, 200).

Nevertheless, even in this novel, where facts are the basis of the narration and the core elements, the presence of narrative subjectivity is very strong. It is subjectivity that collects data on the Camorrist system, collects experiences in the field, provides interpretations of reality and expresses its perplexities, questions and anxieties. Widely discussed, but revealing of all this, is the passage in which Saviano arrives in front of Pier Paolo Pasolini's tomb in Casarsa. He resumes and re-elaborates in a personal key, updating it to the times and his situation, the famous Pasolini's invective on the neo-fascist bombings and the strategy of tension in Italy of the

'60s and '70s, *Che cos'è questo golpe?* [What is this coup?], now collected in *Scritti corsari* [Corsair Writings] with the title *14 novembre 1974. Il romanzo delle stragi* (November 14, 1974. The novel of the massacres). In an operation of explicit crypto-citationsism, he overturns the paradox of the text in which Pasolini accused the distorted intelligence and said he knew the names of the persons responsible for the bombings in Milan in 1969 and in Brescia and Bologna in 1974, even without having the evidence ('I know. But I don't have the evidence. I don't even have any clues'). In doing so, Saviano produces a passionate invective on the socio-economic conditions that have produced the system that he accuses and on the power that the word has in reporting facts:

I know and I can prove it. I know how economies originate and where their smell comes from. The smell of success and victory. I know what sweats of profit. I know. And the truth of the word takes no prisoners because it devours everything and turns everything into evidence. It doesn't need to drag in cross-checks or launch investigations. It observes, considers, looks, listens. It knows. It does not condemn to prison and the witnesses do not retract their statements. No one repents. I know and I can prove it. I know where the pages of the economy manuals vanish, their fractals mutating into materials, things, iron, time, and contracts. I know. The proofs are not concealed in some flash drive buried underground. I don't have compromising videos hidden in a garage in some inaccessible mountain village. Nor do I possess copies of secret service documents. The proofs are irrefutable because they are partial, recorded with my eyes, recounted with words, and tempered with emotions that have echoed off iron and wood. I see, hear, look, talk, and in this way I testify, an ugly word that can still be useful when it whispers, 'It's not true,' in the ear of those who listen to the rhyming lullabies of power. The truth is partial; after all, if it could be reduced to an objective formula, it would be chemistry. I know and I can prove it. And so I tell. About these truths. (Saviano 2010a, 247/216)

The subject that tells is the subject that puts the facts together. It does not invent anything imaginative, but it simply experiences the facts and interprets them in a prose that is always the exact and effective one of investigative journalism. The rhythm is sustained and the sentences are concise, dry and linear. In a novel so rich in reality, so rich in the world,

in everyday life (of course, sick and criminal), the subject emerges with power. There is reality with all its incontrovertible facts, but there is also the perspective of the writer who interprets and discusses them. And it is a perspective that brings with it even more value precisely because it is partial, subjective, unique and returns the complex truth ('these truths', not 'the' truth) of lived and actual experience. We can recognise the events of the world, but we can also recognise the view of the writer who tells them. Even more, in this nonfiction novel there is also a process of reflection of literature on itself (Pasolini's re-elaboration) that could be read as a process and an authorial intervention close to those of the prose of thought. The author, although careful and precise in reporting what happened, continues to be there, strongly claims his own presence, his own personal gaze, and we can see him.²⁰

So, one could go so far as to say that every nonfiction novel is an autofiction.²¹ The facts presented by a nonfiction novel, passing through the dimension of literature, are always looked at from the perspective and through the experience of the author and so the realism to which it seems to aspire—as Walter Siti said—proves in a certain way to be 'the impossible'.²²

Admittedly, this is a peremptory formulation, but it has in itself a great deal of reason.²³ It draws the attention of the analysis of nonfiction into the territory that Peter Lamarque identifies as determining, from a philosophical point of view, the nature of the nonfiction novel. This view differs from Kendall L. Walton, who solves the issue of the nonfiction novel through the test of 'prescribing imagining' (or having the 'function of prescribing imagining'). He considers a case like Norman Mailer's nonfiction novel

²⁰A critical discussion of *Gomorrah* as autofiction is present in Giglioli (2011, 73–79). In general, Giglioli identifies autofiction as one of the possible outcomes of literature (in this case contemporary Italian literature), which seems to have reached a moment of strong transformation, where in the general absence of actual traumas there is a growing need to search for them in representation and self-representation (cf. Giglioli 2011, 53–98).

²¹The autofiction novel is usually catalogued as a specification of the nonfiction novel, a subcategory of it, but it does not seem entirely wrong, in the macrocategory of nonfiction, to put forward the hypothesis that it is, instead, its necessary consequence, its constitutive counterpart. The debate on the autofiction novel is vast and varied, for a general theoretical framework see Colonna (2004) and Gasparini (2008, 295–327).

²²Siti (2013).

²³On the possibilities and limits of realism, see also Hamon (2015).

The Executioner's Song as belonging directly to the realm of fiction beyond any intention of the author (Walton 1990, 79–80).²⁴ Lamarque, to the contrary, points out how the determination of the nonfiction novel should be sought precisely in 'the complex of attitudes taken by both writers and readers and the mutually agreed norms constraining act and judgment' (Lamarque 2014, 103). Nonetheless, except in special cases—such as the original New Journalism—the author's intent, as Lamarque also notes, is not always clearly deliberate. This uncertainty leads to the theoretical discussions about the classification of the nonfiction novel in the fiction or in the nonfiction category.

And it is precisely this indeterminacy in the author's intent and therefore her product, and the reader's ability to orient herself towards it,²⁵ that constitutes the resistance of literature, poetry, to the possibility of becoming completely the prose of ordinariness. Literature tends in a direction that is not its own, but does not become completely different from itself. The difficulty in placing the nonfiction novel in a definite field and its positioning between nonfiction and fiction is the clue, in this case, of the opposition of literature to its complete transformation into something else.

The case of the nonfiction novel, thus, is another possible product of the relationship of literature with its own end. A completely opposite outcome to the exuberant and cerebral one of the prose of thought, but which tends to the flat ascertainment of 'what there is' without any intention of producing something radically different or even less strange. It is an outcome which, like that of the prose of thought, seems in any case genuinely contemporary, given the examples proposed, and which stands, in its own right, as the opposite pole to the first.

²⁴As known, for Walton, to be fiction is enough to be a 'prop in a game of make-believe', even if limited or peripheral. This implies including in fiction works that have fictional elements, but which we tend to find difficult to consider entirely as fiction, such as Berkeley's *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (for an in-depth discussion of Walton's position starting from the issue of the nonfiction novel, see Lamarque 2014, 94–97).

²⁵As Lehman explains it well: 'the decision to engage a nonfictional text triggers a powerful and ongoing dilemma for the author (who implicates herself as a creator of, and as a character in, the text she fashions) and for the reader (who implicates himself as a character in, and as a consumer of, the text he encounters)' (Lehman 1997, 7).

However, as has already been stated, it is not a question of classifying works and determining the characteristics that define their genre, but of bringing out a rationality present in the matter. In this sense, the two poles must be conceived as the extremes of a field of tension, within which there is a great variety of intermediate cases.

4 In Between

In the interpretation proposed here, I have tried to re-read some elements of the Hegelian conception of literature, starting with some works of contemporary literary production and through a series of trends that the critics detect. We have seen how poetry—understood in the broad sense as literature and, in this specific case, as a novel—has in itself all the elements for its own end and how, despite this, it also has the antibodies to resist it and reaffirm itself. In it, there are two different dynamics: the prose of thought, a prose that approaches a philosophical, rational, cerebral dimension, and the prose of everyday life, which instead tries to enter the ordinariness of everyday life into a narrative framework. I proposed identifying in the first option a kind of literature, namely the ‘Mega novel’ or ‘maximalist novel’, which can be included in the list of postmodern experiences and in which the narrative subjectivity, through different strategies, pushes the genre of the novel out of its ‘classical’ conception. In the second case, instead, the so-called nonfiction novel has been indicated as the prose of everyday life, understood in terms of a literature in which everyday life, the facts of the world, the extraordinary ordinariness of things are the main character, through the wise vision and organisation of the material, also here, of the subject that narrates. ‘Prose of thought’ and ‘prose of everyday life’ would therefore be two polarities within ‘poetry’ that push poetry onto one side or the other. However, a clarification is needed. The scheme presented is made up of extremes. Halfway between these two poles, there is an overflowing multiplicity of possibilities, which can intercept the modalities of both fields. In this, in the flexibility—and therefore in the freedom—with which ‘poetry’ is able to choose its own outcomes, there is also the degree of resistance to an end of literature, understood as a radical and irreversible turning point. The fact that the novel is now contended for by one pole or

the other means that it does not lose its centre of gravity and does not fully transform itself into one of the two. In the continuous tension between these two forces, the novel goes through its own transformations, always remaining itself.

This leads to the definition of an intermediate field that corresponds to almost the totality of literary production. In fact, within this field the uniqueness of the novels is produced in an eminent way by their specific reaction to the thrusts of the two poles. I therefore intend to close the chapter with an analysis of two novels that seem to be, also on the basis of the positions of criticism and literary theory, particularly significant from this point of view. These are Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*.

Franzen, in the essay quoted in the opening of this book, *Why Bother?*, complained about the difficulty, almost impossibility, of being able to propose a new great American social novel in contemporary society. The ambition to re-propose this kind of novel, in fact, seemed to be frustrated by the role that newspapers and television had taken in the distribution of news and in general of people's lives (Franzen 2002). A few years later, James Wood,²⁶ analysing *The Corrections* in the background of Franzen's essay, states: '[i]f it can be said that it [this novel] unwittingly enacts a fine argument against the viability of a certain kind of social novel, it must also be said that it constitutes a fine case for the vivacity of another kind of book, the novel of character' (Wood 2004b, 209). With language borrowed from Hegel, we can read this statement as the difficulty, almost the impossibility, for the great epic to assert itself in a contemporary context. Moreover, having abandoned the total and sacred dimension of the past, we are witnessing a turn of the novel genre in the direction of a smaller (but not less profound) scope, that of the characters, of their emotional dimensions, of their ordinary relationships, in short, in the direction of the prose of everyday life. Wood's analysis seems to get to the point of Franzen's

²⁶It is interesting to note that Benjamin Rutter, in the opening of his volume, describes Wood as 'the contemporary critic closest in spirit to what I think of as Hegel's philosophy of art' (Rutter 2010, 1). Moreover, in his *Introduction* Rutter proposes a Hegelian reading of the observations present in Wood's criticisms. Starting from the situation of contemporary American literature, there are traces of correspondences, which certainly should not be taken literally—says the author—but which in a certain sense reveal something Hegelian: thus, DeLillo and Schlegel would be the ironics; Pynchon and Jean Paul, the humorists; Franzen and Novalis, the beautiful souls (Rutter 2010, 1–5).

novel. *The Corrections* is a novel that describes the life of a family in the Midwest, the Lamberts, composed of a father, Alfred, a retired engineer with Parkinson's disease and a grumpy temperament; a mother, Enid, imprisoned for too many years in a marriage that disappoints her; and three children, Gary, Chip and Denise, who with their very different lives try (all in all, in vain) to 'correct' the personalities, defects, idiosyncrasies that they have inherited from the family.²⁷ Franzen's ability is to describe the everyday life of his characters, with their tensions and their small wickednesses. Think of the scene of the chapter *The more he thought about it, the angrier he got* about the phone call between Gary and Enid, in which the mother asks her son if he has reached a decision with his own family about what to do for Christmas Day (Enid's greatest wish, which runs through the book, is in fact to reunite the family once again, for a 'last' Christmas). In that scene, with Gary not knowing what to say to his mother, not having yet reached a mediation with his family, his wife Caroline, who hurts, and the children buzzing around, one can feel, from the very writing, the nervousness of any family where every relationship is worn. It seems to be in all respects a prose of everyday life which describes in all their raw reality, sometimes made of pettiness and exasperation, the interpersonal power relations and conflicts within a family.

Yet Franzen, with *The Corrections*, was one of the authors of the maximalist novel on the list of writers analysed by Ercolino. Ercolino himself dwells on this sort of anomaly and states that Franzen's novel is emblematic of the composite image he intends to give to the maximalist genre, but that this, in no case, can mean a mere return to realism (Ercolino 2014a, 118). Ercolino, therefore, points out that the amount of digressions in *The Corrections* is not at all comparable to that, to take an extreme example, of *Infinite Jest*. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the characteristics of a prose of thought such as digressions, at a macro-level, and the interruption in the order of the story, at a narrower level, are also widely present in the novel. For instance, the character of the father, Alfred, often thinks to

²⁷Wood describes very well what is one of the key themes of the novel: 'Family is the great determinism. One of the subtlest and most moving aspects of Franzen's often distinguished book is the way he develops the idea of "correction" as a doomed struggle against this determinism' (Wood 2004b, 203). On the meaning of family dynamics in Franzen's novel, see also Burn (2008, 98).

himself, and his philosopher is Schopenhauer. In these moments, the narration is interrupted, enters into Alfred's thoughts and reports the maxims and reasoning of the German thinker, and then continues from where it stopped:

There came an upwelling of pain so intense that he had to clench his jaw and refer to his philosophy to prevent its turning into tears.

(Schopenhauer: Only one consideration may serve to explain the sufferings of animals: that the will to live, which underlies the entire world of phenomena, must in their case satisfy its cravings by feeding upon itself.)

He turned off the last lights downstairs, visited the bathroom, and put on fresh pajamas. He had to open his suitcase to retrieve his toothbrush. (Franzen 2001, 273)

In this breaking with the description of ordinary life through the author's interventions, which push the novel for a moment out of the linearity of the narration, there emerges the prose of thought present in Franzen's novel (all the more with essayistic insertions of a philosophical nature). It is a prose of thought that intervenes in the prose of everyday life, which perhaps dominates the work. Ercolino's reasoning behind describing *The Corrections* as a maximalist novel (albeit with all due cautions) is however completely acceptable, especially in his underlining of what he calls a 'hybrid realism' as a result of the relationship between the 'chaos-function' and the 'cosmos-function'. Even if his general analysis—different from the perspective proposed here—probably emphasizes what has been called in Hegelian terms the prose of thought, it is exactly the possibility of a simultaneous presence of the two trends in a dialectical interaction and mutual mixing that should be highlighted. In general, what matters here is not to think of the two extremes of the prose of thought and the prose of everyday life as watertight compartments, as enclosures in which to place the works, but rather to consider them as two poles that create a field of tension. Individual literary phenomena in all their concreteness are affected with a different intensity by one or the other pole. In this way a rationality within the plurality of the literary field can emerge and precisely in this reciprocal convergence of the two trends lies the resistance of literature to its end.

A similar discourse, within certain limits, can be made for Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. To return to Wood, one of his essays, the celebrated *Hysterical Realism*, is dedicated to this novel. Wood coined the expression 'hysterical realism' to describe some of the authors and novels that have been mentioned here in reference to the novel that tends towards philosophisation. Some others he considers are Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* and, indeed, *White Teeth*. Wood's proposal deviates from identifying these novelists as simply postmodern, but moves into further specification and elaboration. It detects the presence of a novel that abolishes conventionality and tries to go beyond itself with vital exuberance, but attributes this to an extreme, 'hysterical' interpretation of realism. This kind of novel, represented by *White Teeth*, uses the elements of reality and realism, consuming, distorting, exasperating them. Through a careful look at the social reality, it presents at the same time unreasonable characterisations of the world (Wood 2004a, 183). And in fact, in Smith we find the social themes and problems of London in the second half of the twentieth century, from multiculturalism to bioethical issues. The story focuses on two families, the Jones and the Iqbals (to which the Chalfen will be added). The framework is that of a complex, multiform, but generally plausible society. On this basis, on 'realistic' material, Smith's 'surpluses' are inserted, whose prose tends not to be directly ascribable to strategies of rupture or techniques of excess. The obsessive presence of time,²⁸ for instance, crosses the novel in a relevant way, even only quantitatively: the chapters are grouped into parts with the names of the characters and the periods treated ('Archie 1945, 1974'; 'Samad 1857, 1984'; 'Irie 1990, 1907'; 'Magit, Millat, and Marcus 1992, 1999'). The precision of the dates crowds the pages of the book ('At 06.27 hours on 1 January 1975' (Smith 2000, 3); '(a urethra infection, 1976, castration dream, 1978, dirty, encrusted sheet discovered but misunderstood by Alsana's great-aunt, 1979) until 1980' (Smith 2000, 139); '8.30 a.m. the first Wednesday of September, 1984' (Smith 2000, 146)). After all, it is the narrator herself who states at some point that 'It's all

²⁸Ercolino, regarding *Underworld* and *White Teeth*, discusses the 'omnivorous relationship with time' (Ercolino 2014a, 83).

about time' (Smith 2000, 244). And this 'obsession' with the dynamics of time becomes structural, almost cinematographic, when the analepsis of the first pages of the book, concerning an episode of the period in which Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal were comrades in World War II, returns to the final scene, giving it meaning and producing the last twist.

Although the frame and the stylistic development seem 'ordinary' because they are taken from everyday life, Smith's inventiveness is at different times, overwhelming, cerebral, sparkling. Wood admittedly criticises this very element. About the paradoxical description of the life of the founder of the Islamic group KEVIN, Brother Ibrāhīm, who, born in Barbados from 'two poverty-stricken barefoot Presbyterian dyspomaniacs', ends up, after a thousand vicissitudes, locked for five years in a garage in Birmingham to study religious texts (Smith 2000, 469), Wood notes an excess of inventive majesty, a complacency towards 'storytelling', a tendency, whose origins he sees in modernism, to concentrate on the formal aspect of the story, leaving aside the human dimension and transforming the characters into caricatures.²⁹ In describing this interpenetration of realistic elements and shocks of surplus, Wood, towards the end of the essay, concludes: '[w]hich way will the ambitious contemporary novel go? Will it dare a picture of life, or just shout a spectacle? *White Teeth* contains both kind of writing' (Wood 2004a, 193).

Smith's novel contains both tensions that of telling life in its most faithful reality and, at the same time, that of shuffling the cards of the 'facts' to leave room for the possibilities of representation. Developing Wood's analysis in the direction of this study, we could say that the pole of literature that goes towards the ordinariness and the cerebral pole of its philosophisation seem to be present and interact with each other in a way that yields unique results. *White Teeth* and *The Corrections*, in short, are exemplary cases of novels in which the complexity of the field of tension produced by the trend of the two poles is evident. Elements of exuberant intellectuality and realistic attachment to the things of the world are exchanged and combined in a coherent framework. They are traversed by both dynamics in a peculiar intersection that provides the specificity and

²⁹'Clearly Smith does not lack for power of invention. The problem is there is too much of it. As realism it is incredible; as satire, it is cartoonish; as cartoon, it is too realistic [...]. It is all shiny externality, a caricature' (Wood 2004a, 183).

uniqueness of both works. Like them, most of the literary field (if not all of it) is composed of works 'in between'. They represent the continuous work that literature does in resisting its own end. The infinite combinations that can arise from the relationship within the two poles, in fact, correspond to the infinite possibilities of literary artworks that are such precisely because they are constantly reconfigured and, resisting their own end, remain so.

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6

Conclusions

In a 2008 essay that appeared in ‘The New York Review of Books’, entitled *Two Paths for the Novel*, then reissued with the partially revised title of *Two Directions for the Novel* in the collection *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays*, Zadie Smith opposes two recently published novels, Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* and Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder*, conceived as two paths that literature can take. The first—the story of a Dutch financial analyst, transplanted from London to New York and the vicissitudes of his family after September 11, 2001—represents a literary possibility which Smith calls ‘lyrical realism’. It derives from Balzac and Flaubert and she describes it as having been in crisis for a long time, but continuing to persist as the most reassuring form we can afford. The second—the paradoxical story of a man who goes into a coma after an accident and who, once awakened, decides with the insurance money to build a palace in which paid people reinterpret situations from his past—is the exact opposite of the first. It falls within so-called American metafiction and at least for the first fifty pages meticulously ‘works through the things we expect of a novel, gleefully taking them apart, brick by brick’ (Smith 2011, 84). Both novels, in their own way, are reflections on the myth of authenticity and paradoxically share elements with each other: *Netherland* has a fundamental uneasiness that makes its way into the novel; in *Remainder*,

the characters at certain times seek the essence of poetry. Both represent two literary traditions, the first of which tends to re-propose the real as it is and within which Smith includes Jane Austin, George Eliot, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Richard Yates and Saul Bellow; the second is alternative, deconstructive and full of theory, within which are Georges Perec, Clarice Lispector, Maurice Blanchot, William Burroughs and James Graham Ballard. The two traditions are often in opposition and are perceived as completely alien to each other, yet there are authors who are claimed by both, placing themselves halfway between the two sides: Melville, Conrad, Kafka, Beckett, Joyce and Nabokov (Smith 2011, 93).

Smith's review of the two books turns into a history of literature and its fate. It is also a meditation on and a critique of editorial policies and reception of literature. On the one hand, there is lyrical realism, which despite the criticism and literary revolutions it has had to go through, is always in vogue, given that 'the received wisdom of literary history is that *Finnegans Wake* did not fundamentally disturb realism's course as Duchamp's urinal disturbed realism in visual arts: the novel is made out of language, the smallest units of which still convey meaning, and so they will always carry the trace of the Real' (Smith 2011, 79). On the other hand, there is an experimental novel like *Remainder* that looks like 'to literature as an assassin, to kill the novel stone dead', whereas in fact 'it means rather to shake the novel out of its present complacency. It clears away a little of the deadwood, offering a glimpse of an alternative road down which the novel might, with difficulty, travel forward', in a sort of 'constructive destruction' (Smith 2011, 79).

This way of reading the trends of literature is also found elsewhere. In his 2009 Charles Norton Lectures, for example, Orhan Pamuk indicated, on the basis of the standard Schillerian distinction, two kinds of sensibility with regard to novelists and readers: on the one hand, the 'naïve', 'who are not at all concerned with the artificial aspects of writing and reading a novel', and on the other hand, the 'reflective' or 'sentimental', 'who are fascinated by the artificiality of the text and its failure to attain reality, and who pay close attention to the methods used in writing novels and to the way our mind works as we read'. And according to Pamuk, being a novelist means 'the art of being both naïve and reflective at the same time' (Pamuk 2010). The two directions are always present, though differently

accented; the great novelist needs to come to terms with both. In this way, we begin to compose a picture of a tradition made up of similar positions¹ and which, in fact, reaches back at least to Schiller.

The interpretation proposed in this book is placed within this tradition. I have tried to insert my view within the more general one of the end of art and, specifically, of literature and the novel. Doing so, I tried to provide an interpretation of some elements of Hegel's philosophy of art in order to interpret the way in which (contemporary) literature deals with its end and what happens to it in the age after its end.

I offered an interpretative scheme consisting of two poles (two tensions, two directions) along which 'poetry', to use Hegelian language, is inserted: at the moment of its end, it tends to the 'prose of thought' and the 'prose of everyday life'.

'Poetry' is the centre of the field of tension, the element that identifies the literary artwork as such and which determines its relationship with the poles. The use of the word as the main means of expression, in fact, brings 'poetry' closer to the pole of the 'prose of thought' or to that of the 'prose of ordinariness'.

The first pole coincides with a propensity for reflection, for cerebral attitudes, and for a movement that tends towards philosophy. By the way of contact with this pole, 'poetry' reflects on itself and dissolves those features that previously described it in its fullest form and content. Through the 'prose of thought', 'poetry' moves past its recognizably 'classical' (in the broadest sense) dimension and undertakes new paths beyond itself. These paths are made of differences, disharmony, exuberance, whirlwinds of thought, the grotesque, of everything that moves away from the idea of a 'harmonious roundness'. It is a pole in which the subject, especially in modernity, emerges in all its strength, in the guise of the artist who expresses her ability in total freedom and who intervenes, more and more explicitly, in the artwork. Language, vehicle of both form and content,

¹For instance think, broadly and with different intentions, of the posthumous essay by the Italian writer and critic Elio Vittorini, *Le due tensioni* (1967). Vittorini traces two basic trends of literature, the 'expressive-affective' and the 'rational'. The first is the underlying trend which corresponds to the great realist tradition and the second brings mutations and upheavals, but that, as he notes bitterly, fails to oust the first (Vittorini 2016, 36).

follows the phantasmagorical and innovative solutions that the subject, with her own rationality, puts into action.

The second pole, on the other hand, that of the 'prose of everyday life' is represented by the entrance of the world into poetry. A world made of ordinary (or extraordinary) routines, 'facts', common situations, personal relationships, and of what is 'out there'. Also in this case, however, the general objectivity that this prose seems to aim at is determined, within it, by a strong subjectivity that is expressed in the perspective that looks at the 'facts', in the eyes that see what 'has happened' and in the personal words that tell it. The language of the 'every day' is a flat, linear, but effective language. Expression is not sought after, but found already within everyday life.

Starting from the identification of these polarities, which were configured on the basis of a re-reading of the Hegelian philosophy of literature, I tried to bring out from a series of specific cases a rationality that confirmed, even in the multiplicity of phenomena, what had been deduced from the conceptual triad 'prose of ordinariness'-'poetry'-'prose of thought' (a triad that emerged, in turn, from a reasoning starting from the object of study, the literary artwork). Precisely because it is not a thought that imposes itself, like a net, on the real, but tries to bring out its own concepts from the real, the attempt has also been to face the complexity of the real. For this reason, the two poles of the 'prose of thought' and of that of 'ordinariness' are not to be understood as rigid determinations, established genres, within which specific cases are to be incorporated. It was a question of conceiving them as extremities between which the multiplicity of the world unfolds. 'Prose of thought' and 'prose of everyday life' are fields of force that influence, to a greater or lesser extent, individual cases of 'poetry'.

With this model, which I have tried to elaborate in the wake of Hegelian reflections and the speculative gesture that innervates them, I wanted to demonstrate two theses:

1. With respect to the other particular arts—especially with respect to the figurative arts, but also to a large extent music, passing through architecture and dance—literature seems to have intrinsic elements which pose a resistance to ending in a radical and, above all, irreversible way.

The end of art, described by Danto as a process that causes a definitive fracture does not apply so immediately to literature. 'Poetry' has something in common with the two poles, since it uses the word or figurative representation, an element that constitutes the three dimensions. And in this way, the 'prose of thought' and the 'prose of everyday life', which constitute the danger of the end, are intrinsically present in the very structure of the literary object.

The status of 'poetry', or literature, despite a plurality of forms and contents, has remained, in its general instances, what we are used to knowing it as. It has been able to go through the changes involved in the history of art (and also its history) during the twentieth century and not experience a fracture similar in quantity and proportion to that which has upset the status of the other arts. Both poles try to conquer the field of 'poetry', both poles try to decree the 'end' of 'poetry'. The former pushes 'poetry' beyond itself in a cerebral way, into a form that is increasingly experimental; the latter tries to engulf 'poetry' in everyday life. Neither of the two poles is able to assert itself, however, because the link with 'poetry', which in this case is the centre of gravity, is indissoluble. It is present, from the beginning, in the general structure of the literary artwork. Precisely because of this impossibility of determining the break, the two poles are placed as two extremes of tension in between which there is an indeterminate variety of forms. Given the non-rigid nature of the boundaries produced by the poles, the structural proximity to the 'prose of thought' and the 'prose of everyday life' has probably allowed 'poetry' to soften the blows of experimentalism and the avant-garde, proving capable of renewing itself in a way that has not completely changed its general status. 'Poetry' has not completely become a 'thing of the past', because it has always had in itself the seeds of its own 'end'.

2. In contemporary literary production, it is possible to detect the presence of these trends. Also through literary theories and literary criticism, one can see how the Hegelian categories, even in an inevitable reformulation, stand up to contemporary concreteness. A 'prose of thought' corresponds to a literature that tries to break the form in which it is forced. It shows itself exuberant towards the 'classicisms' of reference, identifies ever new solutions through the reflexive processes of the free

subject. This is the postmodern prose that in recent years has been configured as 'Mega novel' or 'maximalist novel'; authors such as Thomas Pynchon and David Foster Wallace are the most striking examples. Encyclopaedic works, mammoth, crowded with characters and situations, open reflections and sub-reflections. Looking for all possible strategies to go further. On the other hand, there is a 'prose of ordinariness' that corresponds to a literature that makes everyday life its main subject, content, form and language. It is a literature that tries to deny its fictionality, its artistry; it is the literature that here has been traced back to the experiences of 'nonfiction' (from New Journalism to the recent cases of Alexievich, Carrère, and Saviano). Here, literature allows the world into art, tries to reproduce its 'facts' and 'objects', but conceals, behind this intention of actual correspondence to reality, the particular gaze of the creative subject (every nonfiction novel is an auto-fiction). Between the two poles constituted by the two 'proses', an absolute multiplicity of forms within a complex field of tensions unfolds in all its freedom. Some tend more to the 'prose of thought', others to that of 'everyday life', still others live in a mixture of the two influences. The latest cases have been exemplified here by Jonathan Franzen and Zadie Smith.

Literature resists its own end because of the peculiarity of its medium, the word. It is not a sensitive medium like the others, as it is in a way both sensitive and beyond sensibility. This peculiarity allows it to distinguish itself from the other arts and to take its own path. After its end, there is only literature, which always persists new and renewed. In this resistance to its own end, literature continues—reshaping itself continuously and not bending to radical breaks—to remain itself.

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